THE

Fast of St. Magdalen,

A ROMANCE.

BY

Miss ANNA MARIA PORTER.

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——— "Thou shalt leave
Each thing beloved most dearly: 'tis the last shaft
Shot from the bow of exile." CAREY'S DANTE.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE

FAST OF ST. MAGDALEN.

CHAPTER XIII.

Moment after moment flew away, unperceived by all but Ippolita and Signóra Anzoletta. Count Zucharo had a memory stored with the chivalric tales of the Troubadours, and the mysterious legends of northern romances, and he told the histories he remembered, with that awful air of belief, which is necessary to thrill our hearers.

Rosalia and his wife, listened to him in rapt attention, as he followed up the solemn effect of sacred music, by repeated tales of demon, and maniac, and mur-

derer: but Signora Anzoletta often cast a glance towards the house, wishful of its gallant master's re-appearance; and Ippolita felt uneasily anxious for the well-known sound of his far-off step.

Still he came not. At length Rosalia noticed his protracted absence, and proposed rejoining him within doors.

As they were passing up the great staircase, one of the pages crossed the hall. "Is your Lord above," carelessly asked the Count.

"No, my Lord," replied the youth; "he is with a person on business."

"Still occupied!" exclaimed the Count, shrugging up his shoulders; "truly, Signora, your brother earns his high reputation."

Rosalia thanked him aloud; Ippolita in her thoughts; and they advanced to the saloon.

Another hour dragged heavily on: some of the party were provoked at Valombrosa's stay, and the rest were un-

comfortably conjecturing what business could detain him to so late an hour. Finally tired out, the Count and Countess begged leave to retire for the night, and the half-angry Anzoletta withdrew also. Rosalia and Ippolita only conversed a short time together after their company had left them; and the latter perceiving that her artless friend had none of the strange fears which began to agitate her, was careful not to suggest them: she therefore conducted her to her chamber, and bade her adieu till morning.

No sooner was she alone, than gliding down stairs again, into a retired music-room, she placed herself so that she might hear the voice or foot of Valombrosa as he passed to his room. She dreaded she knew not what. A confusion of alarming images swam before her disordered sight. Her uncle Giuliano secretly deprived of life; her generous friend Rossano imprisoned; herself

demanded by the Florentine government; Valombrosa's life attempted by Guidobaldo Alviano: every horror which fear or fancy could suggest, were conjured up to rack her. Finding herself incapable of supporting many more such moments, she determined to come forth at Valombrosa's approach, and beseech him to end them.

At length she heard the heavy step of some one below, proceeding to the outer hall; and the next instant she heard Valombrosa springing with such rapidity — gay rapidity she thought — up the stairs, that she blushed at her late fancies, and shrunk from encountering him.

Thinking to reach her own chamber ere he could see her, she opened the door of the music-room, and met him on the landing place.

Valombrosa's hasty step was arrested by that action: he turned; and as Ippolita would have passed him, she saw such a fearful expression in his face, that

she retreated back into the apartment, as if to shrink from it.

Valombrosa mechanically followed her in. He shut the door, and coming close up to her, surveyed her from head to foot, with the look of one whose intellect is wandering.

He was ghastly pale, and attempted not to address her.

Terrified by his manner, and still more by his strange speechlessness, Ippolita would have caught his arm, as she cried out, "Speak to me my Lord; for the love of God speak to me!" but ere her hand could grasp his arm, he fell down before her, perfectly insensible.

The [illegible] which must otherwise have escaped her lips, she stifled by an instinctive action: the life of Rosalia seemed one, with that of her brother; and at this dreadful moment, Ippolita thought principally of her.

That death which was on the features of Valombrosa, was however in her heart;

and it was rather despair than hope which now gave her strength to lift his head from the ground.

When she had done so, she gazed wildly on him, and then as wildly round the vacant apartment. A vase containing flowers caught her eye; she hastily pulled out the flowers, and threw the water over Valombrosa. The chill liquid, splashed over his moveless features, leaving them as pale and motionless as before. At that sight, the horrid conviction that he was indeed dead, came over Ippolita; she clasped that insensible head tightly to her breast, as if never to let it go again; but quickly recovering her reason, she started up, and flying down the staircase, to seek assistance, met the old steward.

"Your Lord is ill!" she gasped out; "be careful not to alarm the Signora—but her physician;—he will find him in the south music-room." Her hand mo-

tioned instant obedience, and again she flew up the lofty staircase.

Valombrosa lay where she had left him; and once more Ippolita threw herself on the floor beside him, her brain throbbing with a crowd of hideous imaginations! and even while she watched in agony to see his eyes unclose, she shuddered at the thought of what his recovered sense might have to tell her.

Signor Calvesi came quickly with old Marco, and he would have had Ippolita withdraw, while he opened a vein in Valombrosa's arm; but at such a crisis, every thing gives way before impetuous feeling; and Ippolita only drew a few steps backward, while Marco supported, and the Signor bled their Lord.

It was long ere the blood would flow; it came only drop by drop, slowly increasing; till at length it poured in a kindly stream, and Valombrosa opened his eyes.

He gazed first at Marco and the physician, and then as far round him as his eyes could reach, without any movement of his head. Ippolita therefore remained unseen.

"He is gone then!" he exclaimed, with the tone and air of one relieved from the presence of some dreadful apparition.

"Who, my Lord?" asked Marco, shaking between joy and fear, and melting into tears.

"Yes, weep Marco! weep for your master!" exclaimed Valombrosa, scarcely knowing what he said, as he saw the tears coursing each other down the old man's cheek, wetting the long silver locks which hung over it.

"My Lord, I hope nothing has happened?" asked the physician respectfully.

Valombrosa looked wildly around, then sternly turning to the last speaker, "Conjecture nothing," cried he, "upon

the events of this night, as you value your life! if but a whisper of it reach my sister — and you, Marco, as you love your master—"

The old man caught Valombrosa's hand at this, and pressed his quivering lips on it. Ippolita's smothered anguish now burst forth; and the choaking sobs with which she fell back upon a seat, caused Valombrosa to extricate himself from the arms which held him, and turn towards her.

"Ippolita!" he said, and his eyes softened from their distraction into an expression of such tenderness and grief, that old Marco sunk upon his knees with uplifted hands, silently deprecating that unknown calamity, whatever it might be, which threatened or had overwhelmed his Lord.

Ippolita started up, her tears streaming over the hands she now wrung in uncontrollable agony, "Alas! what is this

evil?" she cried, and her voice became inarticulate.

Valombrosa took her hands in his, and held them for an instant to his burning eyes: he shuddered; then rousing himself, let go her hands, and said with forced calmness, "I have had some intelligence which afflicts me; but I give you my word it has no reference to you — to none you know, except to myself and Rosalia!" — his voice failed at his sister's name; but steadying it again, he added, "I need not ask my friends here, to be silent on this unlucky indisposition: could I have reached my own room first, then—'

"Then would'st thou have perished, Valombrosa!" Ippolita's heart escaped in this moment of sorrow; and the tone in which she uttered that involuntary exclamation, penetrated the unfortunate Valombrosa at once with keener anguish, and a keener sense of her affection.

Ippolita lingered where she was, a few

instants longer; then rousing herself with a convulsive sigh, she crossed herself; and commending Valombrosa to the protection and pity of him who died to save the sinner and to comfort the afflicted, hastened from the scene.

It was a night of tears and prayer to her; to Valombrosa, one of agony too stormy for either. But Rosalia, the unconscious Rosalia, slept the sweet sleep of innocence and peace; dreamt not of horrors; and awoke to a deceitful calm.

Ere the party who had loitered away the preceding evening in the gardens of *Il bel Deserto*, met in Rosalia's cabinet, Ippolita learnt from Marco, that Valombrosa had set out for Florence, not two hours after she left him, and that Marco was charged with the apology of urgent business, to Count Zucharo and the Signora Rosalia.

"My Lord was for going alone," added Marco, "but Signor Calvesi, who is very determined, when it is right to be so,

would not be commanded away from what he called his duty, and so he told my Lord that his pulse frightened him, and that he must be allowed to accompany him, in case he should be ill again by the way; and at last my Lord consented."

Marco stopt; but Ippolita, answering only by a deep sigh, and a bewildered look, — "I have been thinking," resumed the old man, "what all this can be; and I think my dear master is so over bountiful, that a great crash has somehow come, and that —"

"Conjecture nothing, good Marco," breathlessly interrupted Ippolita; "at least utter not your thoughts; remember your Lord forbade it. Endeavour, as I shall do, to appear as if nothing unusual had happened. Beware of exciting curiosity in the household, or alarm in the Signora: — it was your Lord's injunction."

Marco bowed respectfully, and faltering

out a promise of obedience, slowly quitted her presence.

Marco's suggestion was at least something for Ippolita to catch and cling to, amid that sea of strange imaginings, in which her soul was tossing. To imagine Valombrosa stripped of all those advantages of wealth and power which he used so nobly, was indeed afflicting; but what was such privation, to any evil which might menace his life or honour? What was it, to her former dreadful forebodings of new horrors in her own devoted family? What was it, to the intolerable fear that he was doomed to some cruel punishment for having protected her?

His own words had assured her, that whatever was the blow by which he was stricken, it fell only upon himself and Rosalia. "It is too true, then!" she exclaimed; "he is ruined! but Oh Valombrosa, it is not thyself alone; what multitudes fall with thee, friend, benefactor of all!"

She melted into tears as she spoke; for her heart, unburthened of its worst fears, could now yield to tenderness as well as to sorrow; and it needed this timely relief, ere she should be called upon to appear amongst others with outward composure.

Ippolita knew not the sources of Valombrosa's great wealth; they might be like those of her own illustrious ancestors, in the precarious mine of extensive commerce: his monies might be vested in foreign countries; or his estates staked against the chances of some enormous speculation. The vastness of his spirit might have tempted him to increase its means, and thus have made him in one hour a beggar.

All this was too probable; and she might live to witness the wreck of him she loved, and was proud to love, without the power to extend a hand to save him.

Never before had Ippolita felt the full bitterness of poverty; and yet, at the

moment of feeling it, she blest Heaven that it was not in her power to devote to Valombrosa's assistance the important sum which she still hoped from Germany. She feared her sense of justice might have proved less animated than her love. She owed him much 'twas true; but what were such obligations, when compared with her debt of gratitude to those who had resigned their all, for her banished father?

For them who would "endure till the end," life is indeed a continual warfare; and the strife is harder, when the struggle is made by two opposing duties or affections, than when it lies between a virtuous and a forbidden inclination.

"I know nothing — I dare not wish any thing; — but I may pray for thee, Valombrosa!" — and as Ippolita with this inward apostrophe descended to join Rosalia, her aching heart again and again put up such a petition to Heaven.

The mere circumstance of having some

plausible idea to rest upon, gave comparative calmness to Ippolita's thoughts; so that she met and conversed with Rosalia and her guests, and heard Valombrosa's desertion alternately jested upon by the Count, and tenderly excused by his sister, without discovering that she was in the secret of its cause.

But when occasional remarks upon the beauty of *Il bel Deserto* were made by Signora Anzoletta; and the pictures and statues admired by the Countess; when first Valombrosa's taste and then his magnificent spirit, and finally his finer sensibilities, were discussed by Count Zucharo, the tears crowded so fast to her eyes, that she durst not turn them upon any one.

This lovely place, those noble embellishments, which were precious in her eyes, because they were Valombrosa's, might soon have another owner; and all these exquisite sensibilities to art and nature, and honourable distinction, be-

come so many spectres of vanished joys, to their powerless possessor.

"Not so!" whispered her better thoughts; "the remembrance of his present good deeds, will revisit him then, like ministering angels. — O blessed reward of virtue! Earth, and all that it contains, may pass from under the feet of the just, but heaven will never fail them." And once more, with this sacred consolation, Ippolita wiped the tears from her eyes, and smilingly entered into the society around her.

Never had she seen Rosalia so animated! — pleased with her guests, and amiably anxious by her assiduity to prevent the suspicion of Valombrosa's business being less important than he pleaded, and unsuspicious of any cause for uneasiness, the gentle creature endeavoured to fill every passing hour with a new pleasure.

Her innocent gaiety was bitterness to Ippolita: it was like the lamb sport-

ing amongst its companions, while the knife is at the throat of its mother.

Among Rosalia's trifling occupations, was one upon which she used laughingly to pride herself: it was the skilful arrangement of flowers, so as to make the most harmonious disposition of their forms and colours. Her exact remembrance of their tints, and her exquisite sensibility to every shade of perfume, enabled her to pronounce as readily the name of any flower, as though she could see it. She now employed Count Zucharo to gather her a profusion; and having challenged the Countess to a trial of skill, by separately disposing them in baskets which crowned the heads of two statues in the vestibule, she was gaily vaunting her own excellence, late in the evening of this momentous day, when a courier arrived from Florence.

He brought a letter to Rosalia from her physician.

Ippolita had the hard task of reading it to her.

It was couched in cautious terms, and simply stated, that having been led to Florence by business of his own, at the time of the Marquis's visit, he had luckily been at the Palazzo Valombrosa, that morning, when symptoms of fever appeared in his Lordship. Signor Calvesi consequently deemed it right to remain, and detain his Lord from *Il bel Deserto*.

He concluded, by assurances, that he believed his patron's illness might be somewhat tedious, but not in the least dangerous; and he therefore exhorted his fair patient, as she valued her yet unsettled health, and the future comfort of her brother, to rely upon this assurance, and not agitate herself into illness by unfounded terrors.

Ippolita obeyed the eager request of Rosalia, when she read this letter aloud; a request she could not evade without be-

traying her expectation of what was to come.

It tasked her power of self-command to the utmost: for the eyes of every one, but the sealed ones of her who would not have beheld her emotion without alarming remark, were upon her; and though she controuled her expressions, she could not command the motion of her blood. Her lips blanched as she read; and as the Signora Anzoletta noticed their altered colour with more spleen than pity, Ippolita felt that the privilege of escaping from this notice and from the pangs of her own forebodings, by temporary insensibility, would be a positive blessing. But for Rosalia's sake, it was necessary to rally her failing strength, and she did so.

An affectionate and grateful sister is not easily deceived: Rosalia was certain that nothing but extreme illness would make Valombrosa stay in Florence far

from her, and the genial air which he professed always to breathe with peculiar pleasure. She determined to go to him that very night.

"The fever may be an infectious one!" said Count Zucharo, kindly: "had you not better ascertain that point first?"

"Do you think that would stop me?" asked Rosalia, turning quickly upon him a face covered with tears. "Ippolita, you will go with me!"

Ippolita could not resist the impulse of catching her hand, and straining it to her breast: the action answered for her: and with that devoted action, Rosalia was rewarded for her undoubting appeal to friendship.

After a short debate upon the madness of this step, chiefly on the part of Count Zucharo and his sister, it was settled that Rosalia should be partly indulged, by the whole company setting off for Florence at day-break the next day; but if

on reaching the city, Valombrosa's fever should be found infectious, she and Ippolita were to proceed to the house of the Count, and remain there till all danger from contagion was over.

By this plan, Rosalia, who could not at any time be of real service in a sick room, would be yet near enough to hear every hour of her brother's progress, without endangering her life by a useless abode under the same roof with him. At that moment, how did Ippolita wish that *she* were Valombrosa's sister, — she, who *could* watch and wait and minister to him! — she, who thus qualified, would not have allowed any power to keep her from him!"

But poor Rosalia's perseverance in such a determination would have been culpable; since she could not aid her brother in any way: and his consciousness of her thus vainly risking her life, must either destroy him, or retard his recovery. Ippolita therefore seconded

Count Zucharo's arguments by her intreaties, and brought the weeping girl to consent.

The amiable sympathy which was displayed on this occasion, both by Zucharo and his wife, amply made up for a lesser degree of it in Signora Anzoletta.— Could Ippolita have had room in her thoughts for such a reflection, she might have marvelled at that young lady's late evident sensibility to the outward graces, and distinguishing notice of the titled handsome Valombrosa, and her small show of sympathy now, with those who were trembling for his life.—But of such materials was the heart of the Ephesian widow formed!

Preparations for their hasty change of abode, gave some employment to Ippolita, through this second night which she spent without attempting to take rest: and ere the first matin bell had rung, she was waiting at the en-

trance of Rosalia's apartment for her friend's appearance.

How long had that night seemed! impatient to draw near Valombrosa, and know the worst at once, her eyes had watched the sand in the hour-glass, perpetually fancying some obstacle impeded its motion. The last bright look of Valombrosa, as she saw him ascending the steps of the terrace, and his ghastly countenance when she met him not four hours afterwards, at the door of the music-room, haunted her mind,—the hideous dissimilarity of those two appearances, nearly distempered reason; and there were moments when Valombrosa, falling by his own hand, was one of the horrible visions which forced themselves upon her fancy.

On being admitted to her friend, Ippolita assumed an air of hope and comfort: she allowed for a sister's fears, but dwelt much on the skill and sincerity of Signor

Calvesi; the fine constitution and habitual temperance of Valombrosa; — a fever with him was not likely to be of serious consequence: fevers were common disorders in their ardent climate.

"I grant it, dear friend," replied Rosalia, gently sighing; "but the uncommon thing is Orlando's consenting to stay at Florence this unwholesome season; he must be very ill not to bear removal, or even to wish to be removed."

"Of course he would not return hither till it was ascertained whether the disorder is catching," said Ippolita, hastily, trying to obviate the force of a remark which she felt had but too much truth.

"He is in the hands of a good God! after all:" said Rosalia, devoutly; "and I am ready to hope for all mercies at the *Divine hand* which has so long been gracious to us: — yet I may still wish to be near Orlando, and know for what I am to prepare myself — gratitude or sub-

mission!" Her voice faltered as she pronounced the last word, but a smile broke through the tears of her eyes.

No delay was permitted amongst the domestics whose attendance was required; indeed none was sought: all would willingly have gone to be near their beloved Lord. The small party were soon collected; and shortly afterwards took the road to Florence.

As their silent cavalcade moved downwards towards the Val d'Arno, Ippolita looked back with a sorrowing heart: the white pillars of the portico where she had sat so often, and the marble arcades of *Il bel Deserto*, were seen gleaming among the groves of its lawn; above its dome, the morning star was fast extinguishing before the fires of the rising sun; and the delightful freshness of early day came from its waving woods. — Alas! the heart replied not to their charm!

Ippolita believed she saw that house, and those woods, for the last time; and grief for Valombrosa and his sister banished every selfish regret.

CHAPTER XIV.

A JOURNEY of thirty miles was not performed in the sixteenth century as rapidly as now; it was near evening when the travellers reached Florence.

Signor Zucharo insisted upon first going to the Palazzo Valombrosa, to ask the necessary questions; meanwhile the ladies were to alight and refresh themselves at his house.

To this good-natured arrangement no objection could be offered; and proceeding home with the Countess, Rosalia and Ippolita awaited his return.

The information he brought, after a brief absence, was, that he had seen Signor Calvesi, who confessed the Marquis's fever was not infectious, but that

perfect quiet was so indispensible to his recovery, that if Signora Rosalia persisted in taking up her residence at the Palazzo, she must promise not to interfere in any way with the plan laid down. She must not ask to see her brother, nor agitate him by any sounds of lamentation.

To all these requisitions, Rosalia gave immediate consent; and very anxious now, to be within a moment's reach of that beloved brother, she took a grateful leave of friends, sincerely desirous of alleviating her distress; and hastened to the Palazzo.

The dejected countenances of the servants in all the waiting rooms, told Ippolita that their master's condition was worse than Signor Calvesi would allow. Happily Rosalia could not see the saddening faces of those persons, and it was therefore left to Signor Calvesi to tell her what tale he chose.

This tale was little more than a repetition of what he had said to Count Zucharo;

he repeated the assurance, that the Marquis's life was in no danger, and that he had no doubt of his doing well, eventually, provided he were suffered to remain without any disturbance of feelings.

"And the fever is not infectious?" resumed the affectionately-obstinate Rosalia: "then why may I not go to him? the sight of me would comfort him. — I would sit by his bed and not breathe even a word." — And she was trying to find her way out of the apartment, when the physician too hastily exclaimed —

"'Tis useless indeed — he will not know you — that is — I mean — even pleasurable emotions must not agitate him just now. — I will not admit you, Signora."

In the hurry of her own movements, Rosalia lost the first part of this address; but Ippolita caught it, and the idea it conjured up, struck to her heart. — This unconsciousness — that profound quiet which was ordered — the mysterious and

embarrassed air of Calvesi, — all were proofs that whatever might have been the nature of the shock received by Valombrosa, it had dislodged his reason. Her eyes, raised in agony and enquiry to Signor Calvesi, brought a troubled flush into his face: he half-uttered and half-hurried away a sigh; and a deeper shade of concern fell over his features. But turning anew to Rosalia, and repeating his exhortations about her care of her own health, with the respectful authority which his profession allowed, he withdrew to Valombrosa.

Sickness is, in some measure, a trier of friendship. The news of Valombrosa's illness, and suspected danger, soon filled his courts and gates with anxious enquirers, of every age and degree. He was so amiable to his equals, and so benevolent to his inferiors, that all ranks of people were interested in his preservation.

If any thing could have soothed the sad suspense of those nearest to him, it would have been this universal suffrage to his worth: it *did* sooth that of Rosalia. But to Ippolita, who daily expected to hear that the crash of his fortune was come, who more than suspected that his senses were disordered, —it only deepened the anguish of thinking that his power of benefiting and of blessing, was over perhaps for ever.

During the many days in which this suspense lasted, Rosalia admitted no one: she and Ippolita were therefore left to support each other, or rather to seek support from the pious exhortations of Father Sordello.

Each day Signor Calvesi had a little better account to give of Valombrosa; and though Ippolita felt alarmed at the anxious dexterity with which Calvesi avoided any private questions from her, she tried to rely upon what he implied

when speaking confidently of his patron's recovery; and to believe that the noble faculties of the latter were not to be for ever extinguished with his fortunes.

To divert the thoughts of Rosalia, and if possible her own, from too great fixture upon one object, she often turned their discourse upon Prince Angelo Rossano, conjecturing the probable event of his interview with his wife, and thus lessening their own immediate anxieties by sympathising with another's.

Rosalia wished for the Prince, that his interesting society might be her brother's cordial when the latter should be permitted to enjoy the sight of his family; and Ippolita more fervently wished for his return, that Valombrosa might find in him the adviser and the friend which she feared he would need so much.

At the end of ten days, Rosalia was admitted to her brother. She could

not notice any alteration in him, except in his voice, which was unusually low and interrupted: but when that voice, in fond whispers, thanked her for that tender love which had brought her from *Il bel Deserto*, to the hot and unwholesome town, and assured her that he was himself again, the gratefully-weeping Rosalia forgot her past distress.

She spoke to him of Ippolita; dwelling with kind particularity upon every little incident which could flatter the heart of a lover. Valombrosa only sighed deeply. Had she seen the expression of his countenance, she would not have attributed those sighs to mere tenderness: but at this period, Rosalia's misfortune was her blessing; and unlike Ippolita, she gathered nothing from the looks of those about her which contradicted their tongues.

Daily admitted to her brother's apartment, and gratified by the prospect of soon returning to *Il bel Deserto*, the

fond sister's elastic spirits rose in gratitude and joy. She almost chid Ippolita for not being equally happy — Ippolita, whose heart was bleeding for her future trials!

The latter, ill-disguised her feelings under the levity of excusing herself because she was still kept from Valombrosa's society; and Rosalia, easily admitting such an excuse, promised her ample recompense when he should be suffered to leave his own apartment.

When the recovery of his patient was completely assured, Signor Calvesi strenuously advised change of air; and eager to withdraw from the well-meant, but importunate visits of intimate acquaintances, among whom Count Zucharo might be numbered, Valombrosa agreed to follow his sister and Ippolita to *Il bel Deserto*.

Under the protection of Father Sordello, therefore, and some armed ser-

vants, the two friends once more retraced the road to the Apennines.

A storm had come on during their journey, and as they arrived in sight of *Il bel Deserto* late in the evening, Ippolita saw it again, not as she had last seen it, by the cheerful light of morning, but amid a blaze of lightning.

The awful sound of the thunder among the mountains, and of the heavy rain upon their woods, together with the quick flashes of the lightning, as it now quivered among the white arcades of the building, and now vanished into the groves beyond, made a thrilling impression upon her senses. She trembled with momentary superstition: but remembering how often in this very scene she had witnessed and admired the magnificent effect of such a storm on the sublime objects around, without thought of portents, she smiled at her own weakness, and banished it.

On the arrival of their mistress, all the

domestics in the house crowded about her, to ask news of their Lord: when they heard that he was coming slowly back to them, and that although reduced in strength, he was fast regaining health, their joy manifested itself in gestures and exclamations.

Old Marco loitered behind, to catch a few words from Ippolita as she was following Rosalia and the confessor through the vestibule. "Is it indeed so, lady?" he asked earnestly; "is my dear Lord better? and are things going well with him?"

"He is better, Marco," returned Ippolita, suppressing her own emotion to check his. "I know nothing further, and I enquire not." She smiled kindly, but sighed, and passed from him.

As Valombrosa was particularly ordered to avoid the noon-day heats, and it was now the end of August, he rested during the hottest hours; so arrived not at *Il bel Deserto* till long after sun-set on

the second day of his journey. Rosalia expected him about that time, and had prepared a little collation of fruits and ices for his refreshment, in what was called her bower — a sort of sylvan hermitage — in his way to the house.

The white and red flowers of interwoven rose-trees formed its fragrant roof; lilies and carnations its gay furniture; mounds of mossy turf its seats. It opened on a grassy down, secluded by banks fringed with groves of weeping birch.

His favourite fruits, culled by her own hands, and embedded in his favourite flowers, were placed by Rosalia's orders in this pretty retreat, to which she brought her lute, that he might have music when wearied of conversation. A grateful and innocent joy was in her bosom, and on her face; and as Ippolita looked at her, she could with difficulty repress her far different feelings. When the hoofs of the mules which drew Valombrosa's

litter were heard upon the flinty road of the lower mountain, his sister sprung from her seat. "There he is!" she exclaimed. "Oh, now we are going to be happy again. He will soon be quite well at *Il bel Deserto*. And this is such a delicious evening, too! so soft, yet so fresh! it will breathe on him just as we kiss a sleeping child; gently, gently, lest we wake it!"

"O may it breathe health and peace to him!" ejaculated Ippolita fervently; and making the excuse of going to catch sight of the litter, she went out of the bower to weep a few moments alone.

Some of the servants who were stationed to receive their Lord, and direct him to their young mistress, appeared to say he was coming; and at their voices, Ippolita rejoined her friend.

Awhile longer, and Valombrosa, having alighted from the litter, was seen approaching the bower with Calvesi. Ippolita drew far back, by a strange but

irresistible impulse. He entered, and she did not see him. He addressed her, she answered him, yet she heard him not.

When the mist of extreme agitation cleared from before her eyes, she then saw him; but oh, how changed! — pale, wasted, feeble, with sometimes a fixed and sometimes a wandering look; reminding her to agony of what Signor Calvesi had implied.

He talked of his illness, simply *as* an illness without cause or consequence; entered into Rosalia's little story of her preparations for him, with seeming interest; and partook of all the refreshments she offered: — he was even voluble at times, (for not all his efforts could make his conversation deserve the name of lively,) and Rosalia believed him gay.

Ippolita was not so deceived. She marked the acute momentary pang with which he had at first averted his eyes from the gaily-drest table; and she saw

the quivering of his lip, while he uttered assurances of returning health and present happiness: but neither by covert expression of speech, or look, did he revert to what had passed between himself and Ippolita on the night of his departure for Florence: he seemed studiously to avoid her eyes.

This apparent wish of forgetting that interview, together with his assumed vivacity, appeared intended to repel Ippolita's sympathy: and whenever we suspect or discover that the object of our exclusive affection has any feeling which they would not willingly share with us, it is the nature of that affection, to believe that they love us no longer. Perfect confidence seems so inseparable from attachment.

Chilled by this ill-chosen levity, pierced by his neglect, yet conscious he had some gnawing grief within, and incapable alike of affecting such gaiety as his, or of feeling such as Rosalia's, Ippolita spoke to

him seldom, and looked at him still seldomer. She gave her seeming attention to Signor Calvesi, who talked of interesting subjects, though neither very well, nor as if *his* mind was free from uneasy speculations.

At length, when after an hour or two of disjointed conversation, they all retired to the house, Ippolita thanked Heaven that this disappointing interview was over! — this interview, to which she had looked forward with such eagerness!

By Signor Calvesi's advice, they all bade good night to each other in the hall; rest being absolutely necessary for Valombrosa, and Ippolita having more than once pleaded a head-ache, as an excuse to Rosalia for her languid part in the conversation. She said good night to Valombrosa, without venturing to raise her tearful eyes to him; so she saw not the expression in his: but she caught the sound of a heavy sigh from

him as she turned away, which shook her inmost soul.

That sigh might have proceeded from a grief with which she had nothing to do; but for the first time since she had known him, she wished it breathed solely for her.

Never before had Ippolita doubted his attachment; never before had she believed it no longer wrong to indulge her inclination; since his fortunes were falling, and her's (if public rumours might be relied on) were probably near an uprise.

Every virtuous affection increases in tenderness, when the object of that affection is under affliction; and it is therefore more painfully susceptible of repulse or neglect: thus Ippolita thought she could better have borne a change in Valombrosa's regard, had he continued prosperous, than have discovered now, that she was to be dislodged from his

heart, by the first blow of misfortune, like some light vanity of youthful desire.

Pierced and troubled, she retired to her own apartment, with a desolation of feeling beyond all that she had ever known in *Il bel Deserto*. There she wept away the hours, in the sad, sad solitude of the heart.

From that evening, whatever was the cause, Valombrosa certainly appeared entirely changed: he was either in feverish spirits, alarming by their excess, or sunk in such fits of gloomy abstraction, that even Rosalia's voice failed to rouse him. Sometimes he wandered about whole days by himself in the woods, or shut himself up in his own apartment, where he admitted no one but Calvesi, who would not take denial. He was perpetually changing his place: going from *Il bel Deserto* to Florence; to his farms; to the houses of his acquaintance; yet staying no where; and ever returning like the sick man to his usual position, who

has turned from side to side on his restless bed, vainly seeking for ease.

His domestics complained that their master's temper was altered even more than his habits, and that although ever subject to slight gusts of anger, they came rarely, passed quickly, and were effaced by instant kindness; but that now, he was often harsh and violent, and unappeasable for hours together.

The domestic broil of the republic with her revolted state, was just finished, by the submission of Pisa; so Valombrosa had no patriotic pretext for wishing to take up the sword: but Venice was struggling against an unjust confederacy, and he hinted more than once to his sister, that she must not be surprised if he volunteered his service in that cause. Yet when Rosalia tried to make up her mind to his departure, he seemed to think of some fantastic danger at home, from which he must stay to guard her: and he remained at *Il bel Deserto*.

There were times, when from the strain of his conversation, and yet more by the manner with which it was accompanied, Valombrosa gave those about him, reason to apprehend that he meditated abjuring the world, and shutting himself up in a monastery.

He did not wilfully give utterance to this variety of distracted views: But naturally open as day, his heart involuntarily poured itself out; reserving only that one deadly drop which lay at the bottom of its fountain, and poisoned the whole mass.

In all these inconsistencies, Ippolita read the confirmation of her fears, that some great calamity had befallen him; but every day made her doubt its being of the nature old Marco had suggested. His protector was as generously profuse of his money and his credit as ever; he gave employment and relief to as many poor; and nothing was diminished in the splendor and delightfulness of his esta-

blishments: it was impossible, therefore, that he could have sustained any material pecuniary loss. — What then could it be which altered his looks, his manner, his temper; nay, it seemed his very heart?

But it was only to Ippolita, she sadly avowed to herself, that his heart seemed altered: his assiduity about Rosalia's health and happiness, always animated and active, was now as watchful, but more tremblingly tender than ever; at times it appeared even to amount to pain; for he would question her upon the cause of any casual change in her complexion or spirits, as if afraid that some invisible being, might have whispered something to afflict her mind, or unstring her nerves.

To Ippolita herself, this manner gave her nothing to complain of: but she felt that it was a manner intended to ward off all enquiries from her, either by word or look, and that it necessarily threw her to a distance inconsistent with their former friendship; and O how distant from his

lately-avowed love!—that manner formed a barrier between them, which neither delicacy, nor self-respect, nor wounded affection, (though bleeding unto death!) allowed her to pass. She remained, therefore, passively sad, silent, and bewildered.

Rosalia felt this change, without being able exactly to comprehend or account for the altered terms upon which her brother and her friend were now together. She sometimes noticed it to both privately; but each had a plausible reason to give for the action of the moment; and every individual instance of estrangement thus satisfactorily explained, she began to imagine its continuance was her own fancy.

Time is dismally lengthened, when we mark the moments which compose it, by bitter feelings!—a fortnight past thus, was an age to Ippolita: and as no accounts whatever, reached her, either from Prince Angelo or her uncles, her anxiety for them both, amounted to misery. An

accidental conversation, at which she was present, increased this anxiety.

Signor Zucharo having stopped at *Il bel Deserto*, on his way to a place of his own, began the subject of Politics; and while lamenting that the Gonfaloniere was so wedded to the French interest, as not to perceive the chains he was thus preparing for his country, the Signor remarked, that from that very circumstance, notwithstanding the late appearances, no change was likely to take place in favour of the Medici. For, as France protected Soderini, if she, with the other confederates, should crush Venice, (and Venice was now almost at their feet,) no faction could be strong enough to cope with the Gonfaloniere. "I was very sanguine for the exiled house, till this fall of Pisa," continued Zucharo; "but that piece of luck has raised Soderini so high, and put the people into such good humour with him, and this lingering imprisonment of Giuliano di Medici, the

very best of the race, is so unfortunate, that I fear now all hope is over. Strozzi's wife, too, deports herself with such insolence amongst our ladies, that they take care to keep up all the old stories against her father and brother."

"Surely Giuliano will soon be released?" asked Rosalia quickly, eager for Ippolita's sake, to obtain some civil acquiescence at least in her demand. But Signor Zucharo simply answered, "If the Pope had really believed him guilty when he locked him up in that pompous prison, I should see the probability of his release; for then it would depend only upon the proof of his innocence. But when a man is kept in durance, not because he has done evil, but for fear he should do good; — in short, when it is the interest of a certain strong arm, to keep him out of the way, till all his unlawful conquests are secured, I see little chance of the prisoner's release for the next twelvemonth."

At this observation, Ippolita's eye habitually turned its anxious beam towards Valombrosa, scarcely conscious that she had done so, till surprised and thrilled by a glance of tenderest sympathy from his: it was the first kind look they had exchanged for many days, and it seemed to restore their hearts to each other. Yet trying to master the sudden emotion, and stifling a sigh, Valombrosa turned away his head.

Mistaking the cause of his friend's varying colour, Zucharo said laughingly, "I know my blunt politics don't suit your delicate half-way views; and that you think good intention, atones for mischievous actions. I do not; Soderini may think he is admitting a friend, when he gives France free egress to our country; but I am sure he is letting in an enemy. Therefore I wish his power lawfully taken from him; — remember I say lawfully."

"When I perceive any of the mischief

you apprehend, actually appearing," replied Valombrosa, "then shall I too wish Soderini's authority at an end. But his great integrity, is in my opinion, the guarantee of our safety under his government. I cannot bring myself to believe, that a sincerely *well-meaning* person will ever *act* very ill; and with my inexperience of politics, I really have not the temerity to think I know better and see clearer than he does. These are my political principles; and if they could be warped by the truest respect and esteem for Soderini's competitors, they would have yielded long ago to the high character of Giuliano di Medici."

A second glance from his eye, as full of sadness as of tenderness, threw Ippolita into such disorder, that afraid of exposing her feelings, she rose, and glided in silence from the party.

It sometimes seems as if we restrained our very thoughts, as we often do our tears. Ippolita hurried to her own room,

and shut herself in, ere she gave way to the new ideas Count Zucharo had unconsciously awakened; — his information, perhaps solved Valombrosa's mystery.

It was possible, that already acquainted with what Count Zucharo touched on, he might have heard even more to justify him in the belief that the fortunes of her house were fallen for ever; and if his affection for her had become known to the Gonfaloniere, the latter might have deemed it his duty to show him the political culpability of seeking to ally himself with a family, still branded as enemies of the state.

In such a case, it became Valombrosa to conquer his attachment, and no longer to feed it with vain hopes and tender indulgence. Actuated by such a resolution, his present conduct was just and laudable. It was the reverse of Guidobaldo Alviano's, when he sacrificed reputation and good faith to the frenzy of jealous passion; and Ippolita, who had scorned him for

such worthless self-indulgence, felt but too powerfully how much this far different conduct exalted his rival.

She fondly believed, that to preserve her from a blighted life, or pining death, Valombrosa would generously resign splendour and power; even the delightful power of contributing to the enjoyments of many. To constitute the whole of *her* happiness, and to secure it for himself, would have recompensed him for all the trappings of greatness, and the proud pleasure of popularity: but the sacrifice of a principle, was impossible to him. And she was therefore content to wither away, for his sake, at the command of honour; of that stern honour which was now too evidently consuming the summer of his youth.

But how did this explanation agree with his assurance on that fatal evening, that the shock he had sustained was in no way connected with her? Ippolita turned sighing from the embarrassing question;

yet consoled by a single look, which spoke to her of pity and deepest interest, she forgot all that, which had so lately pierced her to the soul.

How fervently did she pray for the return of Prince Angelo, from whom alone she could seek advice and ask assistance! and how bitterly did she condemn herself for having consented to remain parted from her suffering uncle!

In reflections like these, she passed the hours, till the chapel clock reminded her of time; and fearful of appearing in return to shun the sympathy of Valombrosa, she quitted her apartment, and sought that where she had left him.

A servant told her that Count Zucharo was gone; his Lord inspecting the progress of some buildings; and the Signora Rosalia in her oratory with Father Sordello. Ippolita returned therefore, to her own meditations, and throwing a veil round her, sought to refresh and compose her spirits by walking.

At a considerable distance from the villa, stood the remains of a banqueting house. It had been erected in the thirteenth century, by a marquis of Valombrosa, and still bore traces of former magnificence. The only son of a succeeding marquis, fell in the Holy Land; and the news of his death being brought to the father when at a feast in this place, it was deserted ever after by him, and so gradually sunk into decay.

The present possessor, considering it with a painter's eye, suffered the ruin to remain; neither arresting its picturesque decay, by vain repairs, nor encouraging its premature destruction, by allowing the depredations of his peasantry.

Part of the building had fallen, and was now overgrown with bushes spreading amongst the broken arches, so as to be scarcely discernible from the rocky ground about. The shattered pillars and half-destroyed walls were therefore mixed with cypresses and acacias, growing wild in the open courts, or shooting up from

the shells of the roofless towers, where they waved their high tops in all the blasts which swept over the ruin.

Under foot, wherever the shattered stones of the pavement allowed soil for a root to strike in, wall-flowers and yarrow grew in dark profusion. Through such a melancholy covering, the banqueting hall still showed the rich mosaic with which it was paved; and the walls yet preserved some faded remains of paintings by Giotto: once beheld with admiration as the chef-d'œuvres of infant art, now discoloured by damps, defaced by the slime of reptiles; forgotten and despised!

Though the walk to this place was peculiarly wild and wearisome, for the banqueting house stood upon a great height, Ippolita loved the solitude and the scene; and in happier times she would often go there, to muse on the serious reflections it inspired. Thus detaching herself from the lovelier views

and happier thoughts of *Il bel Deserto*, and disciplining her heart to meet the changes of her own destiny.

As she now mechanically took this path, the evening star was shining in a bright blue sky; it gradually faded as she went along, and at length disappeared in the grey dimness of twilight.

No living object crossed her way, as she traversed the darkened woods; except now and then a bat or an owl flitting to its nest in the valley below. By the time she reached the banqueting house, the moon was rising.

She pushed through some wild lilac bushes which obstructed her entrance, and crossing the dismantled hall, ascended what remained of a painted staircase, to the rooms above.

One of these, which from the remnant of a gilded orchestra, and groups of clustered pillars of that exquisite marble called Pavonazzo, had probably been a music-room, was in tolerable preservation,

and it was here that she was accustomed to sit and admire the solemn landscape. She advanced to the open space which had once been occupied by a large balconied window, and seating herself among the ivy, which now overgrew it, gave up her mind to the impressions of the hour and of the scene.

Before her, stretched a long range of mountains clothed with forests, and except where the moonlight fell on them, buried in darkness. Immediately below, a mountain stream glided through the woods of the banqueting house; its narrow course, marked by a line of blacker shade where the trees grew thickest, or by a gleam of reflected light, where their receding branches admitted the full lustre of the moon. Her crystal lamp just touched with silver, the brow of a distant cliff, and part of an old stone cross, which leaned over it.

As the beautiful planet continued rising, her light brightened and extended,

till the whole mountainous range was illuminated; and those objects which had first been prominent, sunk back into shade.

The extent of the woods and the mountains, the tranquil progress of the moon through fleecy clouds, the stillness of every thing around, the mere feeling of perfect solitude, made Ippolita's emotion partake more of awe than of rapture. She repeated her evening address to the Virgin; and wished for Rosalia's voice, that its angelic sound might destroy the thrilling effect of loneliness and night.

As if in obedience to her wish, the distant swell of voices rose from a wooded valley beyond the first line of woods; it was the monks of Valombrosa chaunting the evening service. Their voices, mixed with the solemn peal of the organ, came in a rich and clear stream through the stillness of the air. Ippolita listened in rapt delight; and gradually won from the

nameless apprehension with which she had thought of her distance from human kind, became capable of admiring the present scene, and of suffering her mind to wander upon others.

By degrees the soaring sounds of the abbey chaunt, came fainter and fainter as it softened towards its close; and at last it ceased. But Ippolita, plunged in meditation, was no longer alive to outward impressions. She did not hear even the melancholy shiver of the woods; that mysterious and intermitted sound, which comes and goes we know not how, when not a breath appears to agitate the air. She sat with her eyes fixed upon the heavens, unconscious of what she looked on: at first thinking of her buried friends; then of those still spared to her; and finally, arraigning herself for errors which were now irretrievable.

When she thought over the conversation of Count Zucharo, and the consequent improbability that her family would

ever be restored to the situation which could alone warrant her in encouraging Valombrosa's attachment, she blamed herself for having preserved that secrecy, which by leaving him to believe her of humbler origin, and destitute of other support, had given the ardour of romantic generosity to his passion. Had he known her from the first, as one of the outlawed Medici, then had a transient inclination arisen in his breast, reason and republican pride would have crushed it in his birth: and since his ingenuous temper had so soon given unequivocal proof of his growing attachment, was she not wrong to have waited for her uncle's summons to join him? Ought she not to have risked personal danger, and braved all the vexations of her brother's tyranny, and Guidobaldo's persecution, rather than remained to feed the flame which must never warm her bosom, and which was too surely devouring the heart of her benefactor?

Soothed by that one reconciling look from Valombrosa, she thought of his virtues with softened feelings: his few faults, vanished in their brightness. She contrasted him with Guidobaldo: what a contrast! She compared life passed with Valombrosa in a blissful emulation of affection and usefulness, with the same life wasted in the fruitless gloom of monastic observances. Then she imagined Valombrosa wedded in later years, to one whom events might almost force on him; one perhaps little worthy of his tenderness, and insensible to the endearing character of his sister; one that might cause him to remember her he had resigned, with bitter regret! Tears rose to her eyes at that melancholy thought; though she sadly hoped and trusted, that long ere that period, she should be beyond the griefs of this world.

"O Valombrosa!" she murmured to herself, "how I could have loved thee? how I would have cherished that dearer

part of thyself, thy gentle sister! — but it was not to be — that bright vision has appeared, and passed away, like the other shadows of my dreamy fate!"

Again she relapsed into mournful reverie, unable to detach her softened mind from the contemplation of Valombrosa's many perfections; though the belief that all these amiable and admirable qualities would be finally lost to her, made the contemplation agony.

Where the trees of an opposite chesnut grove crowded into darker gloom, her attention was suddenly struck by some object moving under their overhanging boughs. By the indistinct light, for the moon-beams could not pierce such thick umbrage, she thought she saw the figure of a man, approaching in the direction of the ruin; and certainly she heard footsteps.

With instinctive alarm, she now drew back, and cautiously watched the object of her fears.

The man, pursuing his way, advanced from the shade into the broad moonlight, and as he crossed the open space between the chesnut grove and the banqueting house, Ippolita saw him distinctly.

It was the same person who had obstructed her path, and asked his way, on that night which was never to be forgotten: the night of the Fast of St. Magdalen. She saw the same equivocal look between ferocity and licentiousness; the same cloak of faded crimson wrapping his large proportions; the same dark red plume streaming like a portentous meteor over his haggard visage. Through the foldings of his cloak, she even fancied she could discern the handle of a dagger.

She shuddered. What was this man? and wherefore came he here? perhaps the ruin was the haunt of robbers, and Ippolita might at this very moment be in the rendezvous of murderers!

Her blood froze at the conjecture; and bitterly did she condemn that ro-

mantic fancy, which had brought her in search of sublime emotions, to find real horrors.

The stranger was now close to the building, for she heard his step in the outer court: she no longer saw him, for she hid herself behind the masses of ivy.

The heavy clank of the man's spurs echoed in the hall below; and believing that he was ascending the stairs, she was just going to spring from the window, at the desperate hazard of her life, when the voice of Valombrosa saluting him from an opposite entrance below, as if this *rencontre* were an appointment, at first changed her terror into a joyful sense of protection, and thence into amazement.

If this person were indeed the ill-omened bird that had sung the death-song of Valombrosa's peace, why met they again? and why in this dismal solitude?

Suddenly alarmed for her benefactor,

as she remembered the stranger's dagger, her powers entirely forsook her; and sinking down, she remained without the capability of speaking or moving, an unwilling listener.

The stranger spoke in a hollow, sarcastic tone. "Time wastes," he said; "my necessities press; I must be answered at once. Will you, or will you not?"

"Your demand is monstrous!" was Valombrosa's exclamation. "What will be suspected, if I am known thus to dismember my property, without being able to assign the reason? I granted your first demand, solely to preserve my honour in the world. I'll double your annuity if," — here Valombrosa's voice, which had before pierced Ippolita's ear with its fearful acuteness, was so broken and stifled, that she heard it but in murmurs.

"These lands in Romagna suit my affairs better." Was the stranger's reply. "I must be paid well, for holding my tongue."

"No more! no more!" interrupted Valombrosa, "I know not what I may do — but if I *do* give you the deeds of that property, on that very instant I shall expect you to surrender me those killing documents; — and that secret, which now bows me to the grave — that damning secret! you must swear never to breathe, even into the ear of your confessor."

The dismal sigh which accompanied these words, was prolonged by the dreary echoes of the hall; and Ippolita, seized by an emotion to which she could not have given a name, was breathlessly trying to remove beyond reach of their voices, when she caught perforce, the reply of the stranger. She almost fancied she saw the smile of derision with which it was uttered. "They are not such knees as mine, that wear out your confessionals."

A silence ensued, as if both speakers were pondering over each other's proposals. Ippolita, trembling in every joint,

no longer with fear, but with strange and hideous imaginations, softly tried the bolt of a door which opened on some steps that led down the outside of the building into the woods.

Fearful of being heard, yet throbbing with anxiety to escape, she repeatedly shook the door, and while doing so, heard Valombrosa abruptly exclaim, "Gracious God! I, who once thought dishonour impossible! — yet but for her, I would brave" — he stopt, then madly added, "what! shall I submit to a life of continual apprehension? — no! tell the tale at once."

"Good night then!" returned the stranger, with surly defiance; "I can sell the secret high to some in Florence."

"Stay! — make your conditions!" Valombrosa called out, in accents of frantic despair. "Rather than live thus, in slavery to a" — "Not a murderer!" interrupted his companion, and there was a malignant expression in his tone, which

addressed to any other than Valombrosa, would have frozen Ippolita's blood.

"That word again, and it is your last!" cried Valombrosa in a tremendous voice; and the violent action with which he grasped his sword, was repeated by the echoes.

"Keep your weapon in its scabbard!" was the growling reply; "and I advise you to keep your tongue there too, if you would have me keep your secret! Pride and passion, my Lord Marquis, are not good auxiliaries in such a business as ours; another man would have known long ago how to revenge himself for the affronts put upon him;—but I am a lamb!"—he laughed as he ended.

"And I am desperate!" cried Valombrosa, in accents of despair and agony; "Chafe me not beyond my power to bear," he gasped out, after a pause; "you know I am in your power;"—and here again Ippolita lost the distinct-

ness of his voice, in its agitated suffocation.

The instant she had caught the sounds of angry altercation, her just anxiety not to overhear their discourse, gave place to the equally justifiable one, of ascertaining whether any immediate danger threatened Valombrosa's life from his ruffian-like companion, and she waited awhile to catch what might follow: but after a short silence, they resumed their parly in calmer tones, but too low to be audible to her.

Her hand was still softly trying the bolt of the door, which now came away from the pulverising wood, and left the passage free. She hesitated, she lingered; —to stay like a spy upon the private confidences of Valombrosa, was shameful; and to go, was to leave him in the power of a fiend. Yet she could not assist him in any bodily struggle with such a man: she could however perish in the vain attempt of throwing

herself between him and death; and she who durst not live for Valombrosa, would thus gladly have died for him.

Again she stopt; again she listened:—only temperate sounds now reached her; and they so distinct, that had she staid, she must have heard their whole discourse. Wrestling against every temptation so to end her present frightful thoughts, she stifled a groan of desperate resignation; and commending Valombrosa's safety, to that *powerful Being* who is present every where, she glided through the opened door; and swiftly descending the steps, ran without intermission, through the woods to *Il bel Deserto.*

CHAPTER XV.

ENCOUNTERING no one, not even a servant, in the hall, or corridors, Ippolita hastened to her own apartment, which she had no sooner reached, than she fell down insensible from fatigue and agitation.

How long she lay there, she knew not, for no one came near her; and it was only a fresher night breeze entering her open casement, and blowing upon her face, which brought her back to life.

Rosalia was too much used to her friend's solitary rambles to be alarmed at them; therefore Ippolita had ample time to recover from her fainting fit, ere it was necessary to join her.

But solitude was insupportable to a spirit like her's, tortured by fears for the life of him she loved, and combating against thoughts at once doubtful and distracting. She hurried into the room, to which the sound of Rosalia's sweet strains directed her; and after the interchange of a few words, besought her to proceed with her music.

Rosalia, reckless of evil, obeyed; and while she sang with the voice of an angel, words of peace and comfort, Ippolita traversed the apartment in agonies of dread and expectation.

Happily for her wish of concealing what agitated her, Valombrosa's voice was heard in an anti-chamber many minutes before he himself appeared; and ere he entered, that transport of grateful joy for his safety, which seized and nearly overwhelmed her, had yielded itself to the restraining power of caution.

Valombrosa just turned his heavy eyes upon her, as he was advancing to his

sister; then gently seating himself beside the latter, he prayed her to go on with what soothed him so much.

The touching tone of his voice, the deep melancholy of his countenance, and the languid air of his figure, were in mournful contrast with the frenzied accents which Ippolita had so lately heard from him, and the frantic actions with which she had fancied these accents accompanied.

Recent struggle and present hopelessness were painted on his face; that face so beloved! — that face, till of late so bright with youth, health, and joy! Ippolita "could have wept her spirit at her eyes," as she gazed on him.

"Grief is there — injury is there," she cried to herself, as he looked abstractedly away; "but there is no guilt!" and then she added, "even thine own doubtful words, Valombrosa, shall not evidence against thy noble life."

"At that moment Valombrosa turned,

and met the full fixture of her mournful eyes; their fixture and their expression brought for an instant the light of love and transport into his:—

—— "Mais, le rapide eclair
Qui dans l'obscure nuit perce le sein de l'air,
Dure plus que sa joie!"

He drew a deep sigh, and burying his head in his bosom, remained silent.

Strange as it may appear, when Ippolita retired to her own chamber, she retired with a feeling of consolation, in the midst of all the bitterness of her other thoughts.

True, Valombrosa was unhappy, alas! miserable; he might not tell the cause of his grief; but he no longer repelled her sympathy: and permitted now to show her tenderness and pity in her countenance, and to receive answering tenderness and gratitude from the expression of his, she felt restored to a portion of their former happiness.

Perhaps the same cause gave alleviation to Valombrosa's secret sorrow: for though a settled melancholy appeared from this day in his looks and manner, Ippolita was no longer alarmed by those starts of frenzied gaiety, and bursts of angry violence, which had frequently terrified her for his intellects.

Yet his changed appearance awakened fears for his life; and often did she envy Rosalia's loss of sight, which prevented her from seeing the ravages of gnawing thought, in that once complete figure. Often did she envy her, when she marked his eyes swollen and blood-shot, as though he wept often when alone! — to imagine that manly heart so subdued! — to imagine him weeping in hopeless misery, was to pierce her own heart with a poisoned arrow.

Rosalia, though incapable of noticing her brother's looks, was gradually roused to serious alarm, by his depressed spirits. She observed it to him with gentle re-

proach and fond anxiety; and then Valombrosa, for the first time, pleaded his attachment to Ippolita, and the diminution of his hopes from the sudden increase of strength to the party hostile to her family.

How intolerable was it to a character like his, abhorrent of dissimulation, to be thus forced into something like falsehood! Rosalia was too artless and too sincere to suspect that he had not told her all his griefs; and mixing smiles with her pity, she endeavoured to inspire him with better thoughts, and to cheer him with the certainty that he was beloved by Ippolita.

Had his melancholy been indeed from the source he alleged, the ingenious arguments and sweet prognostics of his sister, must have subdued it; but there was a deeper, darker something within, which her arguments could not reach, her hopes could not brighten: and he left her, perhaps the more miserable,

from the very circumstance of feeling that he loved her dearer than ever.

Not long after this seeming confidence to his sister, a gay company from an adjacent villa came unexpectedly to visit *Il bel Deserto*.

As Valombrosa, accompanied by Rosalia and Ippolita, was conducting this party into the wood-walks, the appearance of that portentous stranger, whom Ippolita had last seen at the banqueting-house, made her start: she saw a sudden colour flush the face of Valombrosa at the same instant; he faultered for a moment in his walk; but recovering his presence of mind, he bowed slightly to the man, as he passed, and said carelessly, " I will attend to your business, Signor, presently; you know your way."

The man half turned, as though he would have joined the party; and as he did so, his eyes boldly roved over the beautiful faces of Ippolita and Rosalia. Valombrosa's cheek changed from burning red

to livid white, and then to fiery red again, as he observed this. Pride and indignation evidently struggled with some other powerful passion within him; but they had the mastery: and the thunderbolt of his eye sternly levelled at the intruder, checked his insolent intention. The man turned again, muttered a word or two, and walked towards the house.

In a few moments afterwards, Valombrosa excused himself to his guests, and, hastily retreating from his sister's request that he would soon return, followed the stranger.

A death-like chill, and consequent trembling, seized Ippolita; with difficulty did she manage to bear her part in the conversation. She foresaw some new trial for Valombrosa, from the appearance of this mysterious visitor; and her imagination again lost itself in conjectures of what his influence could be over the fate of him he tormented.

This racking suspense did not endure

as long as she had feared it would; Valombrosa rejoined them after a moderate absence.

The colour on his cheek was exceedingly raised, and there was a feverish fire in his eyes and manner, which certainly struck others as well as herself. In one of the party, a nephew of the Gonfaloniere's, it seemed to excite a peculiar degree of curiosity; for he looked often on the unguarded countenance of Valombrosa, with an expression of suspicious scrutiny.

Valombrosa meanwhile resumed his office of *Cicerone*, with more than his usual animation: he was not gay, but he was no longer abstracted and listless. He talked much; and his present attentions seemed intended to recompense the company for his former languor.

The visitors dined and supped at *Il bel Deserto*; and though Valombrosa's spirits sunk considerably lower towards evening, Ippolita could not doubt that

part at least of the load which weighed upon him was taken off. She remembered "that damning secret" which he had required the stranger to swear should never be breathed, even to his confessor; and those "killing documents," upon the possession of which so much of his future peace appeared to rest; and she sadly hoped that both demands were now granted.

The nature of these fearful things, she durst not allow herself to imagine. There was but *one* conjecture to be formed from all she had overheard; and that was precisely the conjecture, which coupled with the idea of Valombrosa, it was impossible for her mind to admit. Yet there are thoughts which will cross us, like supernatural shapes, independent of our will: thus Ippolita's mind would often be filled by a sort of phantom scene, which vanished the instant reason endeavoured to scrutinize it.

This scene was compounded of Valom-

brosa's just indignation at Guidobaldo Alviano's persecution; of the former's inflammable temper; and the yet fiercer one of his exasperated rival: strife, and blood, and death, were there. But what share this fearful stranger had in such a scene, or when and where Valombrosa and Guidobaldo could have met, even fancy knew not how to answer.

Shortly after this appearance of his mysterious visitor, Valombrosa took a journey, without assigning the object of it; and having apprized Rosalia of his intention, he went at last, privately, as if desirous to avoid the pain of saying adieu; or rather, as if afraid of displaying any of those feelings which the business of this journey might extort from his naturally frank character.

Unconscious that he had set off, Ippolita was going to join Rosalia and her little pupils, at their morning devotions, when in the path leading to the Rotunda, she encountered Marco. After her usually

kind salutation of the old man, she asked when his Lord was to go?—"He is gone, Lady!" replied Marco with an air of dejection.

"Gone!" repeated Ippolita; and remembering how fondly he used to chide his sister if she cheated him of a farewell embrace, when he went but for a day from home, she could not help exclaiming aloud, "How changed he is!"

"Changed indeed, Lady!" rejoined Marco, tears gathering in his eyes. "I fear he has fallen amongst bad people, who will lead him quite away from his noble self. That stranger, whose name I never can learn, (for he never announces himself,) that ill-looking fellow, who has never come hither, without leaving my Lord half beside himself, is, they say, a desperate gamester,—and I suppose—"

"I must not hear more, good Marco!" interrupted Ippolita with breathless hurry; "it is dreadful to steal any one's secrets, much more those of the Marquis!"

"Alas, this is no secret, at least cannot

long be so," cried Marco, detaining Ippolita by her robe; "and I talk of it to you, Lady, because I think nobody has such power over my Lord as you have; and that if you would but place before his eyes the sorrowful end of such doings, he would be shocked, and brought to himself. The Signora Rosalia, you know, never ought to be troubled, poor thing; so who is there to advise my Lord, that he would mind, now the Prince Rossano is away!"

Ippolita unconsciously seated herself on a fallen tree, struck with Marco's suggestion. If this were a new passion of Valombrosa's, a timely warning might indeed rescue him from future ruin; and though she, of all persons, would have shrunk most from such an office, yet if no other could undertake it with hope of success, she was ready to dare its bitterness.

Her silence, and the expression of her upraised anxious eye, encouraged Marco to proceed. "It was only yesterday," he

continued, "that I heard from one of Florence, that he was in the bank there, when an ill-favoured adventurer-like fellow (who, from his exact description, I know to be the man we speak of,) came with a written order from my Lord for 1000 gold ducats; and my informer said he remembered seeing that very fellow every night, going into a house near his own, where none but gamblers resort. A good while ago, we were all amazed at my Lord's ordering the workmen to be paid off at the aqueduct he was constructing beyond * * * * — such a noble work! and it would have done so much good to such numbers of people! but of course he can't afford any thing like the great sum it would cost, before it can be finished, — if it be true, what one who knows has just told me, that my Lord's journey into Romagna is to see about the comfortable settlement of all the old servants at Palmaria; having parted with the place."

"But if your Lord has sold it!" said Ippolita faintly, her heart dying within her.

"Aye, if he had *sold* it, Lady!" repeated Marco, with an inward sigh; "but the notary said it was so odd, my Lord got away the writings of Palmaria, and never called upon him for others, about purchase money. He thought my master had given the estate away, and cried him up to the skies for his princely magnificence of spirit! Lack-a-day! people think my Lord's fortune bottomless! I wish it may prove so: but cards and dice can make away with a kingdom."

Alarmed into something like credence of Marco's affectionate apprehension that Valombrosa was the dupe and the prey of gamesters, Ippolita questioned the old man further, and learnt that he had no wider grounds for believing his Lord infected with that pernicious passion than those he had already adduced:

namely, his Lord's unaccountable disposal of money and land; the character of his unknown visitor; and the sudden countermand of a great public work, which he had planned with benevolent care, and was executing splendidly.

Ippolita expressed her hope that Marco's information was exaggerated by his informers; but thanking him for his confidence in her, while recommending him to deny the same to any other person, she promised to act upon what he had communicated, provided she could find a proper opportunity, and saw that it was necessary.

She then parted from the officious, well-meaning old man, reflecting his dejected look in her tearful eyes, and hurrying from him choaked with feelings to which she durst not give way before a witness.

As she pursued her melancholy path to the Rotunda, she could think only of what had just passed; and how piercing

was the pain it inflicted! It had been easy for her to dismiss the imagination of some horrible crime committed by the man she honoured as much as she loved: but it was neither so easy nor so rational, to repel at once the possibility of his yielding to an inclination which begins but in idleness and fashion, and too frequently ends in disgrace and ruin.

There were facts adduced by Marco to which no other interpretation could be given than what he had suggested; and the supposed nature of these, was corroborated by the species of mental distress under which Valombrosa laboured. That distress was frantic and gloomy by turns: it made him irascible, and apprehensive of intended affront where none seemed even implied; it gave him the perturbed air of one who is incessantly trying to ward off the disclosure of something he wishes hid from those about him. In short, even the partial heart of gratitude and affection could not but ac-

knowledge, that it seemed as if there were some one transaction of his life, of which he would gladly buy the concealment, at a high price.

Ippolita sought to compare Marco's information with the detached sentences she had overheard in the banqueting-house; and though there were parts of both which might be made to fit, there were others over which the same mysterious cloud still continued to hang.

At any rate, Valombrosa's secret associate was a man of bad character. Perhaps that character might not be known to his unsuspecting victim, whose benevolence might be imposed on by some specious tale; and so drained of the large sum mentioned by Marco.

Alas! Ippolita durst not pursue so flattering an imagination! She had heard herself, what proved that Valombrosa knew his associate to be a wretch, and yet submitted to him. Since the scene of the banqueting-house, Ippolita

had more than once paused upon the propriety of avowing to Valombrosa her reluctant share in it: but every day some circumstance had arisen at the instant to prevent her confession; now she repeated the resolution of doing this, believing the avowal would at once relieve her mind from a humiliating sense of concealment, and afford her protector an opportunity of knowing how much his reputation was suffering.

Valombrosa's absence was brief; and by an agreeable coincidence, Rossano presented himself at *Il bel Deserto*, the very day of its Lord's return.

Prince Angelo's mourning dress rendered inquiries unnecessary. No one trusted themselves with a possible reference to the business which had detained him in Calabria; but each, by that tacit compact of respectful pity which only the best hearts feel and can so express, tried to interest him in other subjects, without violently wresting his thoughts from

those solemn recollections which naturally engaged them.

Rossano appreciated this kindness without noticing it; his feelings were too disordered yet to be allowed indulgence: he could command them, only when they were chained. When the party separated for the night, as he took his lamp from a stand in the anti-room, to which Valombrosa attended him, he said, in a hurried voice, "You guess the event of my journey. — I have had all the satisfaction I durst hope for, in it, — all the suffering I dreaded. What was my bitterest feeling, think you? — The strange change in my own heart. — To look almost with aversion on the countenance I had once loved, — to shrink away from the touch of the hand which once — to feel all within me, more than cold to her who had been the wife of my bosom! — Yet I forgave her: — and she died —"

"Reconciled to Heaven, I hope,"

added Valombrosa, seeing Rossano unable to finish the sentence.

The Prince bent his pale face with an expression of inward conflict, which was heart-piercing. He was silent awhile; then earnestly grasping Valombrosa's hand, and as quickly dropping it, he said, with a wretched smile, "Henceforth no more of this — She is at peace, I trust, — and I — good night!"

Valombrosa returned his gasping "Good night," with one less disordered, but from as sad a soul; and rejoining his sister, repeated what had just passed.

While he spoke of Rossano, Rosalia absorbed by compassion for the other, and incapable of seeing the dejected face of her brother, happily attributed the languor of his voice to sympathy with his friend: but though Ippolita had been blind, sound would have become sight to her when Valombrosa was concerned, and would have told her, that the speaker

was combating feelings, as agonizing perhaps as those he was compassionating.

Valombrosa was indeed paler and thinner, and more spiritless, than when he went from *Il bel Deserto*; and though his eyes, whenever they encountered Ippolita's, gleamed with tender pleasure, they much oftener fixed themselves on the ground in melancholy abstraction.

She thought of all Marco had told her, and the suspicion he had infused; and seeing real sorrow in the countenance of Valombrosa, even while she yielded momentary belief to the idea of his errors, she felt that such sorrow at once purifies from past transgression, and pledges future stability.

The promise Valombrosa had claimed from her on the night of his first known interview with the stranger, made it impossible for Ippolita to indulge her wish of communicating all she knew and feared to Prince Angelo; but she hoped that Angelo himself would notice the

extraordinary change in his friend's manner, (he had already openly commented on that in his appearance,) and that by such notice, he might draw from Valombrosa the secret of its cause. After that, she ventured to hope every thing from the Prince's influence and affection.

Conversation, during this first evening, had been general, and perhaps therefore little satisfactory to all parties: but on the morrow, Ippolita impatiently expected to receive from Prince Angelo the details of those interviews with her uncle the Cardinal, which the Prince had merely touched on, before Valombrosa and his sister.

In conformity with that expectation, the ensuing morning Rossano saw her alone, and gave her the particulars of his communication with her kinsman.

He had to report, that the Cardinal rather disapproved the rule she had laid down for herself, on entering the Palazzo Valombrosa, that of refraining from

every endeavour at influencing the Florentines in favour of her family. Providence, he said, seemed purposely to have opened that avenue to many hearts; and had provided her with powerful instruments in her youth, beauty, and experience: in short, the ambitious, yet otherwise estimable Cardinal, underrated his brother Giuliano's finer honour and wider sense of justice; thinking more of success and less of means.

"And what countenance did you give to such advice, my Prince?" asked Ippolita, with modest firmness.

"None." returned Rossano. "I granted that you had Valombrosa's integrity in your hands; for what man's is not, when he loves passionately?"

"O, do not say so!" interrupted Ippolita with generous horror.

"I repeat it," said the Prince emphatically. "I have looked long and steadily on other hearts as well as my own; and I maintain, that it is in the

power of any woman, who is completely beloved, to lead her lover to what point she pleases — the abyss of ruin, or the pinnacle of fame! — If that point is an unworthy one, I grant you that art, and determination, and heartless selfishness, must combine in the woman's character. And thus it is, that we daily see men hurried by blind passion for such an object, into crime or worldly destruction; while that for a virtuous one, yields obedience to denying circumstances. And why is this?—Because the woman worthy of a sacrifice, disdains to exact it; abhors owing even the happiness she pines for, to her own trick and her lover's weakness; and like a noble victor, when his enemy is down, refuses to pursue the advantage, by taking his life. I do sincerely believe, that a woman truly attached, would not obtain the person beloved, but with the full consent of his whole soul; and if a man yields solely to strong passions skilfully played

upon, in opposition to reason, — or even I will say to some prejudice or false notion of duty, — he cannot be said to give himself, with the consent of his whole soul."

"I beseech you, let me keep a little more of the romantic, in *my* idea of your sex!" said Ippolita, pensively smiling. "I must still believe, that there are a few, (she thought but of one,) whose integrity is a rock which no storms can overturn, no effort undermine! — So now that I have returned your compliment, we will return to our first subject."

Rossano then resumed, by detailing his own arguments against the worldly policy of Cardinal di Medici, and the good-humoured courtesy with which the other defended his opinion; while leaving it entirely to Ippolita's own principles to decide her conduct.

Rossano then spoke of Giuliano. He confessed that as he passed through Bologna on his return from Calabria, he

had abstained from all attempts at seeing him; judging it unwise to irritate or alarm his oppressor, with a new suspicion, when he was on the point of granting the prisoner's enlargement.

Rossano's relation in the sacred college had given him the strongest reasons for believing this happy event would speedily occur, and he promised immediately to dispatch a messenger with the news, and whatever packet Giuliano chose to have forwarded to his niece.

"Then I may hope soon to be with that dear uncle again!" said Ippolita, and she wished to think herself overjoyed at the idea; but such a mortal weight was at her heart, that a sigh burst forth with the words.

"And will you leave this place as freely as you would have done three months ago?" asked Rossano, apprehensively; his eye marking, for the first time, its sense of the alteration in her looks.

"I will not deceive either you or myself," replied Ippolita with noble frankness, even while her whole aspect crimsoned. "If I have erred in staying here, my fault will be my punishment; for it has become dearer to me than ever: and now I shall leave Rosalia with double sorrow, because I fear some severe — some unexpected trial awaits her."

"What mean you?" asked Rossano, changing colour as he spoke.

"She told you last night of the violent fever which seized her brother soon after you left us," replied Ippolita faintly; "and perhaps you attributed the change you must have observed in the Marquis, to that cause; but he is so entirely changed — so desolate — so very — unlike himself, in every way! — his temper — his spirits—his habits—" Poor Ippolita could proceed no further; the feelings which had been gradually working up in her, since Valombrosa's return, and that of the Prince, on whose communications her

departure was to depend, had by this time reached their extremest height, and she all at once lost the power of restraining them: she burst into tears, and ceased speaking.

While Prince Angelo preserved a respectful silence till her emotions should exhaust themselves, Ippolita was inwardly deploring the fatal force of an affection — (in woman's breast, never be it a passion!) — which she had formerly disregarded; and which seemed to be now revenging its slighted power, by humbling her elevated mind to childish feebleness.

"Alas!" she cried to herself, "where is now that patient acquiescence in my destiny, for which I was so grateful to Heaven! — did I in reality love my father and Fabio, little, that I resigned them so easily? and are all my dear uncle's past kindnesses and present sufferings, nothing in comparison with a few sorrowful looks of Valombrosa's? O mystery of love!

which thus makes one earthly object the aim of all our wishes, the source of all our joys and pains, the deity of our fate, what art thou? Sinful or sanctifying? A thing accursed, or blest?" And Ippolita, as she asked herself that question, recollecting what Rossano had said of the passion's power over man's integrity, shuddered to feel it had already loosened those strong ties of duty and inclination, which bound her to the side of her uncle.

Virtuously abhorrent of such a change, she suddenly dried her tears, and turning "her blushing eyes" upon Rossano, said with more calmness, "Do not be misled by your foregone observation on the Marquis Valombrosa; you will go wrong, if you believe that the extraordinary change I perceive in his spirits, has any thing to do with me. My knowledge of his concerns cannot you must suppose, proceed further than his own domestic circle: so all I may tell you is this; that I am sure he is unhappy; that his gentle sister is

ignorant of its cause; and that I believe you are the only person likely to win his confidence, and assist him by advice."

Upon this assurance, so uttered, and so pressed, Prince Angelo enquired, with all the zeal of friendship, into the circumstances which had led Ippolita to these conclusions: but she evaded his questions, without exciting any suspicion in him, that she really knew more than she chose to say; and left him, comforted by his promise of commencing his own observations, and acting accordingly.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was now the very end of September: but the autumn was so peculiarly beautiful, that even among the higher Appenines, the air had as yet but that fresh coolness which revives the strength after the heats of lower regions. Rosalia, therefore, agreed with her brother to remain where they were, till the actual approach of winter; Prince Angelo consented to continue their guest; and Count Zucharo, who was going to conduct his sister to another brother's at Rome, cheerfully allowed his wife to join the party at *Il bel Deserto.*

Thus with social and harmonizing characters, with leisure and various resources, in a scene of beauty and of peace, that

little party seemed destined to find nothing save enjoyment. But if the waters of a fountain are poisoned, in vain does the day-star shine, and the air breathe on them; they may look bright and sweet to the eye, — to the taste they are bitterness and death!

Valombrosa could have been almost happy, but for one maddening remembrance; and even that, often gave way before the charm of cheerful affection. Countess Zucharo had those playful spirits which diversify the most familiar objects: ceaseless good-humour, a talent at witty allusion, a kind heart not too sensitive, and the most cordial interest in whatever interested those she lived with, made her an agreeable companion, and an attaching friend.

Prince Angelo's countenance now and then gave proof that his late suffering came over him like the recollection of some horrid dream; but it was as quickly ba-

nished; and his mind restored itself to society, with all its will, and all its powers.

It seemed as if he thought what had passed in Calabria, guaranteed his heart from future peril; for he yielded himself now without reserve, to the kindest solicitude about Rosalia. He watched her, he waited on her, he entered with equal pleasure into her least amusements, as into her better studies; he became a second Valombrosa to her: while she, as dreadless of danger, and satisfied with friendship; happy and grateful in the present; thought not, dreamt not, wished not for more.

Valombrosa was often roused by the delighted tone of his sister's spirits, and the sight of her kindling health, into his natural animation: but it was the secret power of Ippolita, which like the invisible air awaking the Æolian harp, drew all its music from his soul. Like the sounds of that magic harp, 'twas

wild and mournful; but still it was sweet. Ippolita felt that Valombrosa's spirit was returned to her with more than its former tenderness, and less than its former hope. His eyes habitually fixed themselves on her only; and he would often leave his sister to the guiding arm of Rossano in their walks, that he might wander, though in silence, by her side. It was evident that he believed the moment approached in which he must resign her; and that convinced of its necessity, he was willing to save from the future wreck of happiness, as many fond remembrances as possible.

Ippolita could no longer resist the affecting influence of this submissive dejection; and if she often shunned his supporting arm, and turned resolutely from his subduing discourse, she did it with a pale and tearful look, which poured balm into the very wound it widened. Never yet had she found the opportunity, or rather the courage, she sought, to discuss one

important subject: but the wish to do so, became more powerful every day.

Prince Rossano acknowledged having tried repeatedly to obtain from Valombrosa the secret of his mental malady; the latter had confessed a cause, yet gloomily assured his friend it was a cause he never would explain: and Marco had more than once called Ippolita's attention to his avoidance of his former profuse expenditure.

The consciousness of being a clandestine though unwilling listener to a conversation which the parties concerned, believed unknown to all but themselves, sat on Ippolita's conscience with the weight of a crime; and this painful sensation, rather than any expectation of obtaining from Valombrosa a confession of his indiscretion or his grief, made her anxious for explanation. She was perhaps, unconsciously desirous of proving to herself that he really knew not the ill-fame of his mysterious visitor; and she

lived in the daily hope, or rather fear, the mingled dread and desire, of being called away to other scenes.

The month of October was half advanced, when one evening the Countess Zucharo proposed walking to a quarry of remarkably fine alabaster, which had been lately opened by Valombrosa. The alabaster would be a blank to Rosalia; but the air, and the exercise, and the companions, had charms enough for her, who was content to find her world of joy and beauty in the hearts and voices of the few she loved: with buoyant gaiety, therefore, she took the ready arm of Prince Angelo, leaving her brother to Ippolita and Countess Zucharo.

It was one of those '*crystal evenings*,' which Madame de Sevigné knew so well how to feel and to describe. That transparency of the air, that stillness of the sky, that clearness of every sound, that pure freshness, which often makes us feel as if such days must be eternal, and the

calm enjoyment they diffuse, eternal too, — these were all united to render this evening sweet and memorable.

The walk of the friends lay through descending wood paths to the quarry, which opened in the rocky side of a mountain-chasm, shaded by tall trees, now rich in autumnal tints. A spring of pellucid water bubbled up from the green mosses, which hid its source; and winding for awhile in glittering lines through the maze of giant roots and tall weeds around, at last flung its fractured stream, in crystal drops over the mouth of the quarry.

The sparkling of these bright drops, and of the alabaster within, as the setting sun glanced on them, formed a striking contrast with the deep verdure of the shrubs which fringed, and the massy palms which overhung, the grotto-like entrance; and the figure of a peasant boy, lying along a broken bank in the foreground, with his eyes fixed on the drip-

ping water, as if counting the drops, heightened the picture.

Every one admired the situation of the quarry; some entered it. Rosalia, with a gentle sigh, noticed the delicious scent of the wild flowers which grew profusely in the dewy hollows of the cliffs, and Rossano gathered them for her. She forgot then, that she had any thing to regret.

The boy, whom their entrance had disturbed, having first made an embarrassed obeisance, instantaneously vanished; but he quickly re-appeared, with a handful of remarkably beautiful flowers plucked from one of the steepest cliffs.

He presented them to Rosalia: her brother directed her hand to the pastoral bouquet, kindly accosting the little mountaineer, as one known to him. "'Tis the son of my best workman," he said, as Rossano, struck by the extraordinary intelligence of the boy's look, enquired his name; then turning to Ro-

salia, and eyeing the lonely solitude around, with peculiar pleasure, he added, "Are you afraid of sitting here awhile? 'Tis a scene and an hour for music. If my Rosalia would sing, we should fancy we heard the invisible spirit of the place. She knows her brother loves such fancies."

"But I think Prince Angelo is no friend to imagination?" observed Rosalia timidly.

"It has not been a friend to me!" replied the Prince sighing. "Yet I can forgive and forget; so you shall reconcile us. Sing then, as nymph, — or angel!" He uttered the last word with a fullness of expression which evidently startled and displeased himself, for he looked away with a heightened colour, and added, "I hope that was said with the proper tone of romantic gallantry! I would not discredit the scene, you must allow."

At this moment, the young peasant, who had remained gazing on the group,

repeated his obeisance as if he would withdraw; but Valombrosa kindly laid his hand upon him, and bade him stay. "Your nosegay deserves a reward, Celio; you shall hear your lady sing." The boy's dark eyes and complexion flashed; he answered only by taking his eager station where the hand of Valombrosa directed.

Rosalia's voice fluttered a little as she began, from some secret cause: that celestial voice, heard thus without intermixture of other sound, amid this majestic stillness of woods and wildernesses, was indeed like the music of viewless spirits: it sang the charms of nature and the goodness of Nature's God; and every earthly passion stood suspended before that sacred call to peace and heaven.

Ippolita saw a tear of fond delight glisten through the dark eye-lashes of Valombrosa; her own were humid: Countess Zucharo felt a livelier species of pleasure; and she evinced it by catching the fair singer in her arms.

Rossano, the most powerfully moved, and that from a variety of associations, covered his eyes, and was silent. Little Celio, at first, showed his sensibility by a fixed gaze of wonder and emotion; then suddenly recollecting himself, he pulled off his rustic hat in grateful confusion.

"You like music, then, Celio?" asked Valombrosa. "Oh, yes, my Lord!"— "And you like this place?—what were you doing here?"

"Looking at the trees, and the waters, and the light glancing so through the dark leaves, please your Excellency." The lad answered bashfully, but not fearfully. "And you don't think that idling?" enquired Valombrosa, kindly smiling.— "I've been working all day among the vines, my Lord, and father lets me play of evenings."

"And this is your play?—Rossano!" Valombrosa continued in a lower voice, "we have either an infant poet or painter beside us." And as he said this, he laid

his hand on the black head of the boy, with a look of generous purpose, which made him seem again, the free, the blest, and blessing Valombrosa. "If I live!" he said, as though completing a sentence begun in his own mind; and at those words his countenance saddened, and he removed his hand.

Ippolita's softened eyes met his, as they glanced moistened away: he seemed to fancy she had heard his thoughts; for "a vanishing crimson" crossed his cheek, and he looked down: but recovering the momentary emotion, he held out to her the boy's hat which he had taken from him, and pointing to the garland of wild flowers with which it was prettily dressed, whispered, "Even the arrangement of these weeds show taste and sentiment. This boy is born for something. Shall we go with him to his father's?"

Valombrosa, on Ippolita's animated acquiescence, then proposed aloud extending their walk to Celio's home, where

the ladies might get the refreshment of some fruit. Every one gladly consenting, they proceeded with their little companion.

As they went along, Countess Zucharo by her lively railleries of a boy who preferred lonely musings to social sports, and Valombrosa and Rossano by their more investigating questions, drew forth the instinct of embryo genius in their young guide; but to what that genius particularly pointed, they could not determine. The same habit of reverie, and the same sensibility to nature, distinguishes the painter and the poet; and the boy's short, confused, yet enthusiastic replies, allowed only glimpses of his mind to be discovered.

They proceeded down a descent skirted by Abeals, a tree which sheds its honours early; their path, therefore, was strewn with leaves. "Ah! I am so sorry!" cried Celio, and he checked the involuntary apostrophe.

"Sorry! for what, my child?" asked the ever-tender Rosalia. "That the leaves are falling," was his hesitating answer. "Then you would rather look at the trees, than tread over their fallen leaves?" asked Valombrosa.

"O yes! they are such beautiful colours." Valombrosa released the boy's hand, and drawing towards Rossano, said, smiling, "That answer discovers him, — his genius is for the pencil. The painter loves to study the forms and colours of visible things; the poet wants but some awakening object to waft his soul to worlds invisible — some key-note to waken all his mighty music — and he finds it in the leaf-strewn path!"

As he spoke, they came out into the deep bason where stood the abode of Celio's parents: it was a secluded sylvan scene, of glade, and thicket, and waterfalls. The little building itself, seemed sinking under the luxuriant weight of the vines which covered its very roof, and

empurpled its whole surface with their ripened fruit. In front, a pleasing, bright-eyed woman stood under a large walnut-tree, spreading a table with chesnuts and sallad for supper. One child that could just reach the table with its little hands was officiously helping her; while a lesser one, hanging at her gown, was playfully hiding its rosy face among the folds.

A sun-burnt man stood on a flight of wooden stairs, which led up the outside of the dwelling, to its upper chambers; and while he gathered grapes with one hand, he held in the other an infant of a few months old, which he was every instant pressing to his breast or to his lips.

His wife's cheerful voice, calling him to supper, made him descend the rude staircase; and as he hastened towards her with some affectionate reply, the advancing party caught his attention. The open hilarity of his looks gave immediate way to respectful pleasure: he came

bowing forward, but still retaining his child; the young mother followed him, courtesying and smiling, and whispering her eager children to keep behind.

"Leonardo, we are come to beg a few moments' rest, and a little of that fine fruit," said Valombrosa, pointing to the vine.

Leonardo's wife hastily wiped off the possible dust from a bench near her supper-table, and called Celio to gather a basket of the ripest grapes. The party seated themselves; and soon tasted the delicious sweetness of fruit gathered after the warmth of the day is gone.

Ippolita's eye took the same direction and the same expression as Valombrosa's: she was pleased with the view of humble happiness this scene presented. The simple but pretty dwelling, its little garden full of flowers and vegetables, the sparkling look and active step of the mother, the gratulating glance now and then exchanged between her and her

husband, and the innocent familiarity of their children, formed a picture of rustic worth and rustic enjoyment refreshing to her soul. It awoke the spirit of purest pleasure in Valombrosa. He caressed the children, questioned the parents, and discussed the humble topics of their little *ménage* with that genuine benevolence which seeks more than its own amusement when it draws forth the homely wants and wishes of an inferior.

His enquiries into the habits of Celio, soon extracted from his parents that which the shame-faced boy had denied. They confessed that he attempted drawing; and in spite of the poor fellow's averseness, produced several sketches on bits of wood with coloured chalks, which strikingly evinced the talent at least of imitation.

Valombrosa, who drew himself with a master's pencil, offered to try the boy's genius further, and if he found it a vein

worth working, promised to place him in abler hands.

The gratitude of the parents, and the joyful surprise of the child, were expressed with all that ardour, that sparkle of eye, and that movement of every feature so characteristic of Italian countenance: and as then Valombrosa sighed — it seemed as if strong emotion of any kind brought back the recollection of what oppressed him. He hastily arranged the hour for Celio's attendance on him the next day, and restoring the infant he had just taken, to its father's arms, made some remark upon the approaching twilight.

Rosalia rose at the remark; with difficulty extricating her white and ornamented hands from the wondering clasp of the two little girls, whom her sweet invitations had won from their gratified mother: while Ippolita, whose heart had gone to Celio, merely because he was the

a's generous interest,

lingered behind, to say a few words to him of encouragement and exciting praise.

Countess Zucharo, who had been coquetting with a playful kid among some barberry bushes, ran forward at the call of Prince Angelo, and taking his arm, hurried him and Rosalia away. She had a good-natured meaning in the action.

Ippolita thus obliged to walk singly with Valombrosa, took his offered arm with a little flutter of spirit. For some time they followed the livelier party before them in silence, and at a distance; at length Valombrosa said abruptly, "I am thinking how good the God of nature is! and how little reality there is in what we call the distinctions of fortune!"

"How do you mean?" asked Ippolita, glad to engage him in general speculations.

"Why surely the only difference between the great and the lowly, is that they act on a different theatre. Their parts are the same; whether the scene

be a palace or a shed. The aim of man is happiness, is it not? and does not happiness consist in the consciousness of duties well performed, and of reciprocal affections virtuously exercised? If it does, is there any station of life which has not its duties and its affections? That poor labourer we have left, has the fair creation to look at; a wife, children, friends, to love, as well as those have, who are decorated with wealth and titles: and what wants he then of individual happiness?"

"Nothing but the feeling of its security." Replied Ippolita.

"Ah, that is true!" cried the ingenuous Valombrosa. "The precariousness of means, which depend upon our own continued ability to labour, and upon other men's caprices, must embitter enjoyment. But other destinies, splendid destinies too, have their hollowness!" he added, and his altered brow showed he was thinking of his own.

"They would not be earthly ones, if they had not." Returned Ippolita, apprehensively proceeding; "but there is one blessing, which it is entirely in our own power to render permanent, — the testimony of conscience. Who can be miserable, that has not to reproach himself with wilful guilt?"

"Who?" — and Valombrosa turned upon her, with a voice and look which seemed to say, *I am that man.* He stopt, however, and Ippolita's heart beat thick with many feelings: they overcame her guarded manner for a moment; and her hand involuntarily grasped the arm which supported her, with a pressure strikingly expressive of all she felt.

"What means — this kindly clasp?" asked Valombrosa, stopping suddenly, amazed and transported; then as he gazed on her abashed and averted cheek, added, with altered emotion, "Did you believe your friend unworthy, because you saw him sorrowful?"

Ippolita could not answer: surprise, shame, grief, and joy, stifled her attempts at speech. Valombrosa's question seemed a refutation of all that Marco had feared and uttered, and all that a more alarming speaker had implied; and she felt in her present transport, the extent of her past doubts.

Valombrosa repeated his question, with something of honourable resentment in his countenance; yet so mixed was it with love, that Ippolita's lips ventured to tremble out a confession of her unwilling acquaintance with the scene in the banqueting-house.

On the first mention of that scene, Valombrosa's agitation was uncontrollable: alarmed, eager, rapid in his interrogatories of what she had heard and what suspected, his soul seemed in tortures till she had detailed all, and convinced him that she knew nothing, and suspected nothing, beyond the suspicion infused by his servant.

When she ended, he ceased walking; he took both her hands in his, and bowing his face on them, held them there a long time; then raising his head, he said with a rending sigh, "I thank you for this sincerity. O, Ippolita, if you would let me say *how* I thank you, — but even that indulgence must not be mine."

Ippolita looked on him with eyes in which her whole being seemed to melt; — tender woman! how many are thy sacrifices!

She, whom the impulse of pity, of admiration, and increasing tenderness, would have cast almost at his feet, acknowledging his generous forgiveness of the degrading suspicion she had given way to, and her deep interest in his sorrows, — durst now but turn on him a hasty glance, subdued and tearful.

"Yes! I deserve your pity!" repeated Valombrosa, gazing on her now-shaded, but still humid eyes. "I deserve your pity, and I have not lost my own esteem.

This heart has received a great shock; but the impression will wear out at last, I hope: — it is already softened; — and if—" he broke off, not daring to proceed.

"And is your cause of grief, necessarily a secret from your sister?" Ippolita faultered out, "May not your own imagination heighten it, and the less perturbed reason of another, be required to make you see it exactly as it is! — Why, why, do you lock up your heart from your sister?"

Valombrosa drew back, with an audible shudder. "My sister! — defend her from it, Heaven!" — and the expression of his countenance, made Ippolita's blood thrill.

She looked at him awhile in wild amazement. "Prince Angelo, then," she added, "cannot he prevail on you to seek the relief and counsel of friendship?"

"He, nor no man!" replied Valombrosa, a deeper shade falling over his features; "be the secret buried with me! — O, that it might!" he cried more wildly; and again he checked the impulse of impatient suffering, which was urging him too far.

Ippolita did not speak again, for all her senses were bewildered; and they walked on a few moments, in silent busyness of thought.

Valombrosa suddenly started: Ippolita's eyes instantaneously followed the direction of his, and she then perceived the figure of a man hastily pushing through some trees on their left, into a thicker shade beyond. She thought of Valombrosa's mysterious visitor: it was evident that he thought of him too, for his cheek lost all its colour, and his eye pursued the figure till it was quite lost among the woods.

"Some passenger!" he muttered to himself, and then for the first time, ob-

serving that he and Ippolita had taken a wrong path ; he conducted her into one, which he believed would lead them to their party in advance.

Meanwhile, the clouds which had been gathering on the upper mountains, and gradually sinking lower, burst all at once into violent rain ; obliging them to seek the shelter of a rude arch-way, protected on each side by its masonry, and behind by trees.

As Valombrosa anxiously placed himself before Ippolita, to guard her from the fury of the driving shower beating in at the front, she could but imperfectly see his countenance, shaded as it was, by the growing dusk and the thick plume of his hat ; but she felt the tremulous agitation of his hand, as he tried to cover her more entirely with her mantle, and she heard his repeated sighs. He withdrew from her however, and stood at the entrance.

" It is indeed a fierce storm," said Ippolita, after having struggled awhile,

between her fear for his yet unsettled health, and her dread of their mutual emotion. "You will suffer from being wet; pray do not stand so immediately in the rain."

"You wish my life, Ippolita!" said Valombrosa, turning round as he spoke, with all the tenderness of suppressed and yearning love. "You no longer suspect me then, of being the associate of gamesters, — the willing companion of one infamous! — You have not withdrawn your confidence in my integrity, though my conduct has been strange, and I may not explain it! O, tell me," he cried, approaching her with increasing emotion, "tell me that you forgive all the waywardness of a temper, never sufficiently calm, and of late, sorely, sorely stung! — tell me that you will not hate the changed, the wretched Valombrosa."

"Hate thee, Valombrosa!" repeated Ippolita, and the heavy drops which fell from her eyes upon the hand with

which he had impetuously taken her's, answered his frantic question.

Valombrosa fell at her feet, and attempted to speak; but only inarticulate sounds, mixed with thronging sighs, came from his oppressed soul. Ippolita vainly struggled to extricate herself from his mournful clasp: she trembled. "O Valombrosa," she gasped out, at last, ineffectually trying to repel him, "is this generous? You have confessed yourself unhappy from some unknown cause, and now when my softened heart has scarcely strength to combat with itself against you and fate — you make the struggle — the sacrifice — the duty — almost beyond my power."

"I am selfish, Ippolita!" replied Valombrosa, still at her feet in a paroxysm of tenderness and despair — "I am selfish — ungenerous! — but if you could guess what want this wretched heart has of some cordial drop to sustain it! — I once looked to the restoration of your

family as the day-dawn of my happiness—for then it would not have been treason to my country, to lovè, as I love now—but now, perhaps, the Medici would spurn such union—if some malignant demon should ever whisper!"——

"Valombrosa, you distract me!" exclaimed Ippolita, as he stopt abruptly. "I cannot live, and be thus crossed by horrible thoughts!—I adjure you, in the name of God, and on the faith of an accountable soul, tell me that you are not conscious of any criminal act!—tell me that you are ruined—undone—betrayed into momentary folly—stripped by it of rank, wealth, power; if all that be possible—and then, O how joyfully will I vow myself for life, your's, or God's—another's never!"

"Then mine, mine!" exclaimed the transported Valombrosa—"I call that God to witness, that except the common frailties of man's nature, my heart"—At that moment, the report of a trom-

bone was heard close beside them: Ippolita felt Valombrosa fall back from her arms; a deadly groan accompanied his fall: but ere her stupified soul could take in the extent of her calamity, she saw a man break through the trees behind, and the next instant found herself in his grasp. The smoke from the trombone concealed his face.

"My aim was sure!—I have not killed her!" exclaimed a horrid voice: at its first accent she uttered a dismal cry, for she knew the murderer; and sunk unresisting, because insensible, upon his breast.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ippòlita re-opened her eyes in the gloom of a deep cavern, which a lighted pine-branch partially illuminated.

The still and noisome air of the place, clung round her like the damps of death; and as she closed her eyes anew, in agony of spirit, she hoped that death was indeed releasing her from all future suffering.

But alas! even that wretched hope was not to be realised! The voice of Guidobaldo Alviano whispering impassioned entreaties, and his lawless arms pressing her against his breast, recalled the life within her. She tried to break from him. The loneliness and gloom of the cave, his turbulent transport, the triumphant tone of his language; and yet more, the burning expression of his gaze, filled her with

horrid apprehensions, and the name of Valombrosa burst instinctively from her lips.

No sooner did she pronounce that name, than all the late scene rushed upon her memory; and uttering a dismal cry she fell back into the insensibility from which she was just recovered.

It was long ere the efforts of Guidobaldo, and another person, who had hitherto kept out of sight, could restore her senses: when they did so, she looked earnestly, for a moment, at the companion of the former; then, without speaking, tore herself out of Guidobaldo's arms, and retreating to a distance, threw herself on the ground.

Guidobaldo followed, and would have taken her hand; but shuddering back, she hastily wrapt her arms round in her dress, looking at him with eyes that spoke too plainly: again she shuddered.

Guidobaldo understood what was passing in her mind. "Yes!" he exclaimed

with proud fierceness, "this hand has given death to the presumptuous fool who durst dispute my prior right to your heart! — Yet it is a renowned soldier's hand, and well worth the charms of the rarest dame in Italy." As he spoke, the consciousness of many fond suits rejected, or sported with from ladies won without wooing, heightened the lustre of his extraordinary personal beauty. "I offer this hand to you again, Ippolita, in the presence of your brother; and I bring another claim on your heart. — My importunities have released your uncle Giuliano."

A thrill of joy, almost of gratitude, did indeed shoot through the distracted breast of Ippolita. The wan despair of her looks, momentarily vanished as she turned her eyes on her brother, exclaiming, — "Confirm it Lorenzo — I dare not believe."

Lorenzo impatiently answerd, "It ill becomes you to doubt the assertion of a

man of honour. But I repeat, it was Guidobaldo's intercessions, with the sacrifice he offered to his Holiness, which have bought your uncle's freedom. It is your part to recompense him. His courage has settled the matter between you and that Florentine who had not manliness to espouse the cause of your family, with all his pretended love for you — and now it is your duty to bestow yourself on the man who has just renounced his very birthright for our sakes."

Guidobaldo fell at Ippolita's feet with assumed humbleness, and trying to soften his untuneable voice, said, " Pity me Ippolita, that you force me to remind you of all you owe me ! — Has any other done what I have done to deserve you ? Have I not, from my boyhood, been in every battle fought for your family rights ? Did I not put my honour and my military fame at hazard, in the kingdom of Naples, when I left the Spanish camp to join the French standard, simply because your

father was protected by it? Did I not save you from drowning, when the probability was that I must perish in the attempt?"

"Yes!" replied Ippolita, regarding him with ghastly sternness, "you saved my life—but you have taken that of Valombrosa!"

Fierce and violent passions passed in successive flashes over the fine features of Guidobaldo; he had strength, however, to master the rising storm within, and after a few moments portentous silence, he resumed: "And now what have I done?—After making my escape from France, and wearing out two tedious months in distracting search for you, I hear you are listening to the vows of another; yet I hasten to Rome, I weary all my friends with importunities for their interest with the Pontiff, and at last I procure your uncle's enlargement, by engaging, as my imprisoned father's representative, to tear his formidable band

from the Venetian service, and engage it in that of his Holiness. — I thus cut myself off, at once, from the rich inheritance of the Castello Pordenone, which the Republic had decreed to my father, even in captivity —(and perhaps from all his private patrimony) — and I do this, for her who thinks one kind look too great a recompense."

During this studied address, Ippolita's pale and bewildered countenance gradually enlightened, kindled, and blazed out in strong expression. Indignant and noble disdain, afflicted yet triumphant comparison between his character and that of Valombrosa, made up that expression. Guidobaldo shrunk from the full fixture of her rarely fixed eyes; yet he roughly exclaimed, "Does not your own heart whisper another obligation? Most men, devoured with such a passion as mine, and so slighted, and with such claims, would have thought all means lawful which might have secured you.

Had I not made your brother the partner of my plan to regain you, — had you found yourself alone with me, in this place, — at this hour, — with love and revenge to prompt me, — what would have been your terror?"

Ippolita interrupted him with a shuddering cry. "Yes," she gasped out, repulsing him with her trembling hands, as he strove to draw her towards him; "I thank you for that, Guidobaldo. O proceed in generosity, and take me to some convent, where I may end my hunted life in prayer and peace!"

"We take you where you shall remain till you learn that a woman's duty is obedience!" interrupted the young Lorenzo, with boyish petulance. "If I am to acknowledge you as my sister, I shall expect a sister's compliance: and standing thus in my father's place, I command you to forget the spendthrift Valombrosa, and reward Guidobaldo."

"Forget thee, my murdered Valombrosa!" echoed Ippolita; and as she

spoke, every other image fled from her mind. Clasping her hands in agonised appeal, it seemed as if she would have pierced with her upraised eyes the invisible veil which hid his spirit from her. It was but a moment of convulsive transport: the fervour of her action suddenly relaxed; thought on thought, image on image, came crowding in upon her soul with direful distinctness. She appeared to become conscious for the first time that Valombrosa was indeed no more. She gazed on the spot where she fancied she saw his bleeding body, her features rapidly assuming an air of madness; till she mistook her own wild shriek for that of Rosalia; and shrieking again and again, she threw herself along the rocky floor of the cavern.

"Her outcries will discover us!" exclaimed Lorenzo. "We must prevent this, and get her away. I have no taste for losing my life in such a boyish adventure. Let us get her to the horses."

Guidobaldo did not at first hear this request, so absorbed was he in gazing on the figure of Ippolita. The beautiful lines of that figure, were now defined in all their softness, and now obscured, by the foldings of her white garments, and her own agitated movements. Her profusion of dark hair, entirely loosened from confinement, and falling all over her, set off by contrast the unsunned snows of her face and neck. There was a bright crimson, too, in her cheek, so expressive of agony, that any other eye than Guidobaldo's would have looked upon it with compassion and remorse. He continued to gaze and to admire.

The contradictory emotions that gaze excited in him, were powerfully marked upon his clouding brow. Her beauty inflamed his fevered passion, but her mental suffering roused his resentment; and muttering some threat of future vengeance, he raised her up, while Lorenzo

guarded against her cries, by completely enveloping her head in a large and thick mantle.

Ippolita was by this time in that torpid state of soul and body which follows great and successive bursts of grief. She would have found it difficult to have spoken, had she attempted it; still more difficult to resist the force even of the stripling Lorenzo: but she had no wish to do either. Absorbed in the belief of Valombrosa's death, and Rosalia's desolation, she no longer cared what became of herself.

There was but one evil capable of still agitating her in idea, and from that her brother's presence secured her. Without complaint, as without struggle, therefore, she suffered herself to be borne through the pathless part of a wood skirting the cavern, amidst the violent recoil of giant boughs, and the rending of angry shrubs; while Guidobaldo who bore her, and Lorenzo who followed, stopt every

second step, to curse the impeding trees, the rending briars, the insecure footing, and the unpierceable darkness.

When they reached a road practicable for horses, they stopt; and Lorenzo, drawing a small bugle from under his cloak, blew one or two shrill blasts: these were answered, and not merely by echoes. Shortly afterwards a man appeared, mounted on one horse and leading another. He dismounted at seeing them; and as he assisted in securing Ippolita to the coat-belt of Guidobaldo, he conversed in whispers with her brother. Lorenzo having seen his sister properly fixed, vaulted into the saddle this person had quitted, and leaving him to find his own way on foot to whatever place he was destined, they set off at full gallop from the mountains.

Their course was long and circuitous, for they evidently avoided all encounters, and they travelled only during the hours of darkness. But though they

halted through the principal part of every day, sometimes in lone huts, sometimes in woods or caves, Ippolita had no opportunity of imploring assistance. Whenever they allowed her an interval of repose alone, they kept watch at the door of the apartment and below its window, so that private discourse with any one was impossible. She thought not, however, of flight; her soul was locked up from every outward impression, and she moved and spoke mechanically.

In the intervals of this tedious journey, Guidobaldo often urged his own suit, and Lorenzo seconded it: but neither to the turbulent ardour of the one, nor to the splenetic authoritativeness of the other, did Ippolita give any reply, except deep and convulsive sighs, accompanied by involuntary movements expressive of abhorrence. Her persecutors were at last wearied, or had agreed to try a different method; and for the remainder of the time, Lorenzo only vented his ill-

humour in bitter sarcasms at her obstinate sullenness; while Guidobaldo, affecting to interpose between her and any new distress, took up the part of generous forbearance.

Perhaps her companions were induced to treat her more indulgently, from observing the alarming alteration which had taken place in her appearance and strength. She took with passive submission whatever was offered to her, of rest and refreshment, and she never burst into frenzies of grief; but she wasted with the rapidity of a flaming torch hurried through the air.—Her voice became hourly more and more indistinct; and the perpetual tremor of her now-colourless lips, and nearly-closed eyelids, excited astonishment and alarm in Guidobaldo. To him, who knew not the signs of mental sickness, that sorest of all, these extraordinary symptoms seemed the precursors of immediate dissolution; he redoubled his care of her person, when it was her heart

he should have spared. Ippolita's health, however, *did* alter: by degrees an expression of bodily suffering mixed with her fixed look of despair; and the increased debility of her frame, evinced itself by unconscious incessant weeping. As she was hurried along through every variety of weather and road, as she sat on the ground or in some hut while their horses rested, or as she lay along some rude pallet incapable of sleep, the silent tears would trickle without intermission as without consciousness, down her withering cheeks.

Sometimes irritated and sometimes subdued by the blighting effect of these tears upon the loveliness he madly coveted, Guidobaldo determined to make a last effort to turn the current of her affection towards himself.

They had crossed Italy to an obscure part on the Adriatic, and ere they set sail for the opposite coast, he besought Lorenzo to leave him alone awhile with

Ippolita, as they sat altogether within the vacant walls of a fisherman's hut.

Lorenzo acquiesced.

It was night, and a turbid-coloured moon struggling at intervals through clouds which were hurrying across her disk, threw occasional gleams over that wasted figure, which Guidobaldo had observed in such completeness of lovely form, not two weeks back, in the cave near *Il bel Descrto.* — The same fitful light brightened at intervals the features of the towering Guidobaldo; and as it glanced through the clusters of his raven hair, and whitened the polish of his forehead, it seemed to add supernatural beauty to the mortal graces it found: but it developed there, no moral charm.

He sought to moderate the fiery expression of his eyes, by dropping over them their thick fringes; but in the recesses of those eyes, there was a lurking something discoverable, which like a

tiger in its den, seemed in the very act to spring out upon its victim.

He approached Ippolita, and would have taken her hand, but she shrunk silently into the folds of her veil. His colour mounted; when it sunk again, he cast himself on one knee beside her.

"Ippolita," he said, in that harsh voice so discordant with the finely-moulded lips whence it issued, "see to what you bend me! — we shall soon part — for I go to fulfil my engagement to the Sovereign Pontiff; an engagement with which I bought your uncle's freedom. — I go, self-deprived of a noble inheritance. — I go to fight, to bleed, to die perhaps for the sake of you and your's! —Will you not grant me one kind look, one word of hope and comfort for all this?"

He paused, — but Ippolita, without moving or speaking, remained with her eyes fixed on the ground. — He bit his lip, and was some time before he could quell himself sufficiently to resume,

though not in the same tone of lowly intreaty.

"What wins a woman's heart?" he cried, "is it personal advantages? — I disdain them in my own sex, therefore I proclaim myself second to none." And as he cast a proud glance over a figure which even Phidias might have selected for the model of a God, his dark brow expanded into momentary splendour. "Is it courage? — What field has not drank my blood, and the life's-blood of my enemies? — Is it a constant and consuming passion? — Mine has burnt within me for six long years, in spite of ingratitude and absence. And if sacrifices may obtain a woman, how many have I not made to you? Two wishes were nearest your heart, the release of your uncle Giuliano, and the possession of that important document which substantiates your legitimacy and therefore your claim on Germany. — I have conquered both for you! your uncle you already know is at large: —

and here is that paper which my father would never have yielded to me, had he suspected the madly-romantic use for which I intended it."

Guidobaldo held out the paper as he spoke. — Ippolita had caught part of his long address, and what had then reached her widely-distant sense, gave her an indistinct wish of comprehending the whole. She instinctively took the paper, and said a few words indicative of her perplexed faculties.

Encouraged by this first show of interest in a subject not immediately connected with the direful one which weighed upon her heart, Guidobaldo rapidly explained his meaning; adding an assurance that although bound in friendship to her brother, who had hitherto contested her right to their father's legacy, he was willing thus to sin against that friendship, to win her; and that provided she would promise him her hand, he would, by openly avowing what

he had done, (even while guaranteeing to her the future disposal of the contested money,) expose himself to her brother's vengeance.

All of life which grief had left in the sad bosom of Ippolita, was roused by this disgraceful exposure of a soul incapable of imagining consistent virtue, much less of assuming its appearance. She half started from her rude couch, and throwing away the contested paper, exclaimed, "O base and hateful! I would not accept even my right, from a hand like your's, equally polluted with falsehood and blood! — I can but die; — I feel that I am dying; — and God will provide for my father's poor exiles."

When she concluded, she sunk back, exhausted with this brief animation; while Guidobaldo, levelling his powerful eyes at her, said in the gasping voice of ill-controlled fury, "Beware, Signora! My love may be changed to hatred; — and if it be! — You are in my power, —

and she that my devouring passion has respected hitherto, may feel to her sorrow and shame, that hatred will submit to no laws, — regard no ties, — set kindred, friends, the whole world, even my own weak scruples, at defiance, and reduce her — to the thing I then shall scorn!"

As these terrible words transformed the transcendent splendidness of his features and complexion into the hideous blaze which devours a bed of covered corruption, Ippolita sprung from her couch, exclaiming madly, "My brother! — Lorenzo! — O where is he?"

That protection from insult, of which his association with Guidobaldo seemed to assure her, whether he were absent or present, and on which she had too rashly presumed, was all at once proved hollow; and, prompted by a wild idea of escape, she endeavoured to gain the door: but her limbs, weakened by illness and grief, failed under her, and she sunk, in despite

of herself, upon the hastily-extended arm of Guidobaldo. At that instant Lorenzo entered abruptly: by her situation and her appearance, he thought her fainting, and without caution, therefore, he exclaimed to Guidobaldo, "What cursed imp crippled your aim when you shot at that mischievous Florentine? Renati is come, and he tells me that he lives after all."

"Lives! does Valombrosa live?" shrieked Ippolita, springing up from Guidobaldo's arm like a blessed spirit from its clay at the joyful call to heaven.

"Curse on your officious tongue!" exclaimed Guidobaldo to his companion: then hastily following up the insulting curse by the mean apology, not of contrition but interestedness, he sternly turned to Ippolita, who was now upon her knees, in an ecstacy of silent gratitude, "This hand has death for him yet!"

He spoke to one whose heart had no

longer room for aught but joy. Again and again her fervently-clasped hands and upraised eyes, her cheeks radiant with living red, and re-coloured lips quivering imperfect sounds, uttered eloquent thanksgiving. But even while she continued kneeling, her thoughts imperceptibly changed: and as the immediate rapture of devotional exaltation sunk, a thousand melting ideas of Valombrosa and Rosalia, a thousand fond hopes and expectations, and visions for the future, founded on the knowledge of his being still in life, poured in upon her heart, and dissolved her into tears. Delicious tears! for they were those of gratitude and of hope!

While she gave loose to this balmy relief, Guidobaldo drew Lorenzo aside, and after conversing with him a few moments in an under voice, they at length abruptly quitted the room. Their absence was temporary freedom to Ippolita.

It seemed as if their presence had

restrained her, for now her grateful transport spoke in words; and though the language in which her full soul poured itself out, might be broken, and full of repetitions, it was fervent and expressive.

Guidobaldo's revengeful threat was remembered only to be triumphantly discarded: the present instance of Almighty protection of that precious life, seemed an ægis capable of defending him in future from all other harm. The unmanly threat against her own honour was as little regarded; for Valombrosa lived: and confidence of protection, is so inseparable in a woman's mind from the idea of him she loves, that she sometimes thinks she can know no fear, while assured of his existence and his fidelity.

The name of that generous and now dearer benefactor, was repeated by her again and again; at each utterance of that name pressing her hands upon her

heart, as if they could thus fold to it the living Valombrosa.

Her face, though bathed in streaming tears, was bright with a joy as rarely felt as witnessed; and at once restored to life, and the wish for life, by an unexpected blessing, she felt that she could now support the utmost which cruelty and oppression could heap upon her.

The assurance of her uncle's liberation was another source of gratitude. Wherever she might be taken, surely his efforts seconding those of Valombrosa, would discover her prison, and finally restore her to them? Prince Angelo, too, would lend his friendly aid; and with Providence to bless, what had she to dread?

Recalled thus to the keenest interest in every thing connected with her situation, Ippolita endeavoured to recollect what had been so often poured into her inattentive ear by her petulant brother,

and his more stormy companion during their journey.

She guessed that the Renati they talked of, as having brought the news of Valombrosa's escape from immediate death, had been left near *Il bel Deserto* to watch the event, and to bring the intelligence by a quicker mode of travelling than that they had pursued. Perhaps he brought also political information which might oblige them both to leave her in her appointed prison! In that case, she might hereafter find means to convey some intimation of her forced detention, to her uncles, or her friends in Tuscany.

From another prospect also, she drew hope: the treacherous duplicity of Guidobaldo to the very man whose concurrence he had bought by oaths of faith and service; that duplicity made her hope that the seed of future disagreement was sown between them, and if so, her liberation might be the consequence. Even now, a word from her, convicting Guido-

baldo's double-dealing about the disputed claim on Austria, would be enough to involve them in all the flames of inextinguishable enmity—But who might perish in these flames?—her brother!—her father's dearly-prized son, though her unkind brother! The thought was not to be dwelt upon.

These reflections were interrupted by the entrance of Lorenzo. He contemplated her re-animated form—re-animated as if by miracle—with waspish humour; and throwing himself down on a seat, desired her to attend to what he was going to say.

He then proceeded to inform her, that it was his determination she should reward the many services of Guidobaldo, by giving him her hand; that in determining this, he was simply performing a duty to their father's memory, and to the family interest: since her continued refusal, or her marriage with another, would at once

convert Guidobaldo, and his renowned father, into their implacable enemies.

Having discovered, he said, her retreat at *Il bel Deserto*, and from various circumstances suspecting Valombrosa's attachment, and assured of his obstinate adherence to the Gonfaloniere, Lorenzo had considered it incumbent on him to tear her from him. He had therefore cheerfully abetted Guidobaldo's scheme of lying in wait for her among the woods where they heard she walked often alone; and they were now on their way to a secure place where she should remain without intercourse with any one, but the persons appointed to guard her, till she came to her senses, and consented to become her cousin's wife.

Lorenzo amplified his friendship for Guidobaldo, and what they owed to the elder Alviano; he dwelt upon his own duties as the head of the Medici party, (for like a foolish boy he claimed that rank in preference to his uncles,) upon

his zeal for a sister, who was evidently on the point of becoming the ruined dupe of Valombrosa, the nature of whose regard might be guessed at, since it did not impel him to espouse the cause of her family; — and finally upon what he was pleased to call the weakness of his uncle Giuliano's character, and consequent incompetency to direct her conduct.

He laid great stress upon his own disinterestedness throughout the whole affair: only forgetting to mention the very main-spring of the action, his hope of obtaining from the Emperor the large remainder of that disputed debt, which Ippolita sought by every honest means; and of which, her ceasing to urge for so long a time, might be understood or construed into a resignation.

Lorenzo ended by saying, " The vessel is now in waiting, which is to carry you to another country, to a place far beyond the guess of any of your misjudging

friends. There you must expect to pass your life; unless you consent either to marry Guidobaldo on the instant, or to give him a solemn promise of becoming his, when he returns from the service which he and I are obliged to go upon. I leave you half an hour for consideration."

"Stay, Lorenzo!" cried Ippolita, seeing him move towards the door, "I need no time for consideration: I never will consent to either proposition; do with me what you please. I will not debase myself by supplications, which I know would never move you. Cruel as you are, for your own honour's sake you dare not place mine in danger; and that uninjured, there is no evil I cannot bear as becomes the daughter of Piero di Medici. There is a God above, who will strengthen me, and deliver me at last out of your hands. My trust in him, is not to be shaken."

"Yes! deliver you by the gate of

death." Exclaimed Lorenzo, knitting his brow, "you will never escape by any other, I promise you, if once we get you across the Adriatic. And for whom do you give up Guidobaldo Alviano, the son of the greatest captain of our age — for an effeminate spendthrift!—a coward, and a murderer!"

"A murderer!" echoed Ippolita, starting from her seat, her eyes for the first time since they had opened on life, flashing with anger.

Lorenzo's irritated eye with a fixture of steadier wrath and darker purpose, looked her's down. "Take care of provoking me too much," he said with forced calmness, "I allow no liberties to women. — I repeat the charge of murder on your ostentatious time-serving lover. — The story of his father's and brother's encounter with robbers in the Bolognese, was never credited by any but fools. — It was so prodigiously lucky that they should *both* fall! — It was so marvellously

fortunate that the robbers should so exactly find out that they were passing with only three attendants! — and it was so much better still, that they should politely let one servant escape with life, merely to tell the story, and swear his young Lord into the possession of that unwieldy fortune! — I believe it is pretty well known that this fellow was paid high for his evidence, and sent beyond sea: but if ever he return, and I rule in Florence, I can tell you the thing shall be looked into, — aye, sifted to the bottom — though it cost your minion his head."

Ippolita sunk into the seat from which she had risen, aghast and trembling. Lorenzo perceiving the effect of his hardy accusation, went on with increased triumph. "The fool is but a half-way villain after all — or rather a coward, whom the *shadow* of his own crime affrights — not the *deed* itself! — Guidobaldo overheard his mad confessions to you, ere he sent the ball those confessions justified. —

And you listened to them — and promised to be his! — shame! shame!

Vivid crimson flushed the face of Ippolita, while pressing her hands on her relieved heart, she exclaimed with a beaming smile, "I thank you, Lorenzo, for recalling that scene! Valombrosa's confessions were those of an afflicted, not a guilty spirit. I have anchored my soul upon his integrity; and neither your calumnies nor cruelty can ever shake it. — He and I may never meet again, — most likely we never shall; (and as she uttered these sad words, the unusual fire of her eyes was quenched in tears); but the remembrance of his virtues, and generous affection, will last my life, — nay will survive the wreck of this disputed frame, and make a rich part of my happiness in a world to come."

Lorenzo's boyish impatience of any opposition, was impelling him to proceed with fresh arguments against Valombrosa and in favor of Guidobaldo, but recollect-

ing that his selfish aim would be as well attained by his sister's durance, as by her marriage with the latter; and that perhaps if that event were to take place, his friend might not keep his word of obliging her to renounce her pecuniary claim on Austria, he checked his petulant reply, and coldly asked her, if she were prepared to spend her days in confinement.

"I am at your mercy," said Ippolita, and of course you take me where you will. But I repeat, no power shall force me to bestow my hand on Guidobaldo."

"Enough!" cried the waspish Lorenzo, and opening the door, (which he locked after him,) he disappeared.

It was long before he returned, and when he did so, Guidobaldo came with him.

Ippolita's eye, now stimulated to observation of every thing connected with herself, instantly perceived signs of disagreement between the colleagues. Lorenzo's manner to Guidobaldo was a

compound of impatience and scrupulous ceremony; and that of Guidobaldo to him, was haughtily cold: his face threatened like a thunder-cloud. The lightning escaped from it, when he vouchsafed a glance to Ippolita.—She felt the appalling flash, but she neither braved nor shrunk at it.

Guidobaldo never spoke; he only held the taper, by the light of which, Lorenzo covered his sister with a thick cloak, to muffle the sound of her voice, if she should attempt to call the attention of any chance passenger: he then extinguished the light, and Ippolita felt herself again seized by the man she hated, and borne into the open air.

The miserable habitation from which they issued, stood singly, behind the rocks of an unfrequented coast; and she now distinctly heard the turbulent roar of the waves, and the hollower sound of winds, as if they were rapidly approaching the sea.

Some other person was added to their party, for she distinguished two voices in advance of Guidobaldo, who continued to bear her in sullen silence: — no other voice or foot of friendly traveller, met her ear; and when Lorenzo called out, "I spy her sail!" she guessed he saw the bark which was to waft her to her prison; and the faint hope she had indulged, of meeting some providential rescue, instantly vanished.

Bowing her head upon her breast, with inward resignation to the Divine Will, she silently commended herself, and the few she loved, to the protection of the same gracious Providence; while Guidobaldo sat down with her on the sand, and uncovered her face to give her air.

Released from his hated grasp, Ippolita looked round, and saw by the dim light of a struggling moon, a dismal coast, without show of habitation, and a wide stretch of boiling sea. A bracera lay close to the shore, in which were three

stout mariners whom she heard speaking a language unknown to her. All attempts, therefore, to interest them in her situation, were cut off by this cruel precaution of choosing the natives of a different country from her's.

The instant her eye fell on the person with Lorenzo, a cold thrill running through her veins, assured her that he was the same who had been in waiting with the horses, on the fatal night which tore her from *Il bel Deserto.*

With what extraordinary force does every minute thing strike us, when we receive some great blow! — We know not that we see or think of them at the moment; but in after times they are inseparably connected with the remembrance of our suffering.

Thus Ippolita could have told the position of every tree and every stone in the scene where she was placed on horseback, and borne from the domain of Valombrosa: even the very fashion and colour

of this man's habit haunted her memory. She now recognized him with an involuntary exclamation; but quickly recollecting that it was he who had brought the intelligence of Valombrosa's safety, she looked again at him, almost as though he had been Valombrosa's preserver.

That Valombrosa was severely wounded she could not doubt: the deadly groan with which he had fallen to the ground on that fatal evening, was but too convincing of the melancholy fact; yet it seemed, from Lorenzo's vexation, that the wound was not dangerous; and with the fond credulity of love, she yielded to that blessed belief.

Her trance of thought was interrupted by the violent action with which Guidobaldo again snatched her up in his arms, and put her on board the bracera. When they were all embarked, the little vessel weighed anchor, and cautiously loosing her sails to the boisterous wind, shot at once into the gulf before them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As soon as they were on board, Guido-baldo addressed Ippolita for the first time, coldly inquiring whether she did not choose to retire below and take some repose?

Ippolita mildly answered in the affirmative: he then assisted her down the ill-constructed steps which led to the cabin, when opening a door, and pausing at the entrance, he said, with moody resentment, "Good night, Madam! you are mistaken if you expect me to sue to you any further. My heart is to be lost, as well as won: — and you may regret the loss for your own sake, and rue it, for that of your kinsman, and my rival."

He waited not reply, but as soon as

she had entered the cabin, locked the door on her, and returned to the deck.

Ippolita might have smiled at the wretched vanity which prompted Guidobaldo to assume a manner intended to alarm her with the probability of losing so admired an adorer as himself; but his threats against Valombrosa and her kinsman filled her with another apprehension: she trembled for their lives; and in an agony of grief poured out her saddened soul in prayer.

That done, she pressed her quivering lips upon a bracelet of Rosalia's hair, which that dear friend had wrought with the letters of their intermingled names, and fastened with a clasp of jewels round her arm. Of Valombrosa she had but one relic; a single flower, plucked for her by his hand in the garden of Celio's parents, on the evening of their last meeting. The flower was broken and withered; but she had preserved it in her breast through all the casualties of

travelling and temporary unconsciousness: and now as she pressed it again and again to that desolated breast, and wetted it with tears, every particular of the scene in which it was given, rushed upon her mind.

The tranquil comfort of Leonardo's humble home, the benevolent pleasure with which it was contemplated by the dear friends who were with her, and the generous views of Valombrosa for the young Celio, all came on her heart in a torrent of tenderness and regret.

"Alas, the poor child!" she sighed to herself, thinking of that favoured boy, "this is thy first lesson of disappointment—at least of hope delayed:" and then her thoughts wandered to his benefactor; busy with all he had looked, and all he had said.

Their last conversation, on the spot hideous to memory, was again and again dwelt upon. That she had then assured Valombrosa of her affection, was now a

solace to the pain of imagining they might never meet again: and though she acknowledged, that in yielding to the impulse of agonised tenderness seeking confirmation of its object's worthiness, she had sinned against her better purpose, she would not allow herself to regret an indiscretion, which must at least, release Valombrosa from the worst fear of an attached heart, that of the person beloved bestowing her hand upon another. "His first anguish moderated by the certainty of my attachment," she said, sighing, "time and absence, if events increase to render our re-union madness, will by degrees wean him from that fervour of generous wishes, with which" —— she interrupted herself by a shower of tears: and as she wept with increasing vehemence, added, "O, no, no, Valombrosa, I seem to have no shelter left but in thy matchless heart; let me retain that, till I find refuge in my grave!"

There had been a time, when Ippolita

loved Valombrosa dearly, yet could with mournful fortitude contemplate the necessity of resigning not only his society, but his heart; of yielding him entirely to some happier woman: that time, however, was past!

Love for a noble object has no limits: it grows with the growth of his virtues, or with the more intimate knowledge of them; till at length, life, (as far as it relates to this world,) has no aim beyond the contemplation of his excellence, and the enjoyment of his affection.

The many affecting circumstances which had of late surrounded Valombrosa, and thrown a shade of tender interest over the brightness of his former state, tended to deepen the impression made upon her, by his attaching qualities and his love. Those moments of doubt which had occasionally racked her, when taught to suspect his distracted feelings were the consequences of criminal folly, seemed to demand atonement; and above

all, the certainty that his life had been endangered by her furious kinsmen, and would still be sought by their ruthless swords, made her feel that in devoting every hope of her sex and youth to Valombrosa, she was making a poor return for all his sufferings and all his sacrifices.

So to devote herself might be romantic, but was not culpable: she owed her life, perhaps her honour to Valombrosa; and if she might not repay such a debt by constituting his happiness, she believed that gratitude commanded her not to increase his pains. And would she not have done so, had she endeavoured to expel him from her heart?

To such self-sacrifice, surely one so situated, might yield without blame?— For her's was not that humiliating affection, which however laudably placed, still couples itself with reproach, because unshared by its object, and is therefore felt only as a weakness and a degradation; — that affection, at which the very heart

blushes, and against which it struggles, or ought to struggle unceasingly, and from which, so struggling, it must escape at last; — she but returned the warmest, the most disinterested, the most generously-avowed attachment of which a human soul is capable.

In Ippolita's present cheerless state, to permit herself to cherish this fond remembrance of him who imaged to her all the virtues, was to retain almost happiness: and comforted beyond hope, by discovering that he lived, she once more checked her tears, and casting herself along the rude pallet prepared for her, sunk by degrees into sleep.

Awakened the next morning by the roaring of winds and waters, and by the agitated motion of the vessel, she arose bewildered: some moments elapsed ere she could recollect where she was. The horrors of her situation then flashed upon her, and she turned her thoughts towards a deliverance from them.

The little light that was admitted into the cabin, through the small and now barricadoed windows, served but to increase her despair, by showing how completely she must consider herself at the disposal of others. — She could see through sufficiently, to know that the heavens were darkened, and portentous of a coming storm.

The violent agitation of the vessel, together with the howling of the winds, the discordant sounds of the sailors, and the beating of the rain that was now descending in torrents on the deck, acting on a mind already borne down under the heaviest source of oppression, overpowered her natural courage, and made her dread that the death for which she had recently prayed was about to overtake her.

When Ippolita believed Valombrosa violently rifled of life, death was her only wish; but now that she might hope to see him again, existence became dear to her; and she trembled to think that an

offended God might be about to punish her criminal impatience of that existence, by terminating it at the very instant in which fresh hopes opened before her.

Awe-struck with this impression, as the storm increased she sunk upon her knees, imploring forgiveness for the impiety of the feeling that had dictated such a wish: and praying for the happiness of those she should leave behind, submitted herself entirely to the Divine Will.

In the midst of her supplications, Lorenzo entered: he smiled scornfully at her posture, yet with an air of some disturbance, exhorted her not to give way to ridiculous fears. "The sea is somewhat rough," he said; "but the wind blows from a right quarter: if it continue so, we shall reach the opposite coast before night-fall. It would be a demon's trick, were we to sink with such a business as this in hand! if ever I trust myself again in any of Guidobaldo's wrong-headed —" Lorenzo bit his lip, adding peevishly, as

he set down a flask of milk and some rude cakes, " There is your breakfast, take it, and think over our last conversation."

Before Ippolita could answer, he disappeared, and she heard the key again turned in the lock of the door. " Lorenzo," she cried, "for mercy sake, do not fasten me in! — what will become of me, if the vessel" — Lorenzo neither heard nor spoke; and with a throb of just resentment, she turned away from the door, and sat down, determined to abide in silent patience, whatever was appointed her now to suffer.

Again left to herself, Ippolita relapsed into a train of thoughts natural to her situation. She recalled the cruel scenes she had passed through within these last few hours, and was lost in imagining their termination.

From various circumstances, and from a few indistinct glimpses which she had been able to catch from the small window of her cabin, she conjectured that she

had been embarked on the Adriatic, somewhere between Rimini and Ravenna: and taking the idea from her brother's words, felt convinced that she was to be conveyed to the opposite coast.

The rapid progress of the vessel now suddenly decreased; and its motion changed, so as to induce an idea that either the course they were steering had been intentionally altered, or that the wind had shifted. Ippolita, whose thoughts were now solely occupied in the anticipation of her doom, reflected on the words of Lorenzo, and not thinking it likely that a plan so taken would be changed without any apparent reason, imagined the latter circumstance; and memory instantly imaged the several dangers which would await the vessel if involved in the intricacies of that archipelago of islands which stud the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

Shipwreck, with all its horrors, appeared before her already-troubled imagination,

and added another source of agonizing terror. Yet perhaps the very storm at which she shuddered, might be intended to give her freedom! She might be providentially saved from the wreck by humane strangers, and so released from present thraldom!

She had nearly succeeded in re-assuring her courage with such thoughts, when alarm again seized on her agitated feelings. A crash, as of the falling of a mast, the fluttering thunder of splitting canvass, and the mingled roar of groan and insurrection that suddenly burst on her ear, foreboded some dreadful disaster. At that instant Guidobaldo entered: "The vessel must inevitably be lost," he cried; "promise to be mine, and I save you."

"Leave me to my fate!" gasped Ippolita, convulsively tearing herself out of his grasp, and clasping her hands in desperate acquiescence. "O my friends!" she added, bursting into an agony of

tears, as she uttered what she thought a last farewell to the absent Valombrosa and his sister.

Fresh clamours were heard on the deck. " We sink!" urged Guidobaldo. " Will you be mine — or die!"

" Die!" repeated the death-pale Ippolita, in an inward voice, sinking upon her knees, and holding up her hands locked together in agony of prayer, while all the despair of a former scene in which so many dear to her had perished, seized upon her soul.

" Obstinate to the last!" exclaimed Guidobaldo, stamping with ungovernable fury and momentary hatred. " Perish then!" and he rushed from her: but whether his desertion were feigned, or if real might have been repented of, is uncertain, time was not given him to prove; for the voice of Lorenzo, calling from above, " We are safe! the danger's past!" caused Ippolita to start from the floor, and gliding past him, she was on

the deck and by the side of her brother ere he was aware of her flight.

The sight which there presented itself, was truly terrific. The elemental war that was yet raging, threatened destruction from all sides. The ragged reef of rocks on which the mountainous seas were dashing with exterminating fury, and from which the vessel had most miraculously been preserved from striking, were still close; the deck was strewed with the shattered mast and rigging; and altogether presented a scene, whence feeble woman, without the aid of superhuman help, must in vain have expected escape.

Lorenzo was somewhat moved, when he felt his arm grasped by his sister's trembling hands, with a look intreating protection: he turned on her an eye of indulgence; and at that moment Ippolita thought he resembled their father. She burst into tears, and clung to him more earnestly.

"The danger is over, Ippolita," he said; "be composed. In a few hours we shall get into some friendly port near us, and repair our damage. Go below again; and be sure there is nothing to fear now."

"O my brother!" whispered Ippolita, hoping that the prospect of a frightful death had softened his heart, "I beseech you, in the name of that dear father whom at this instant you look so like, spare me further misery! Relieve me from Guidobaldo's persecution, and bury me in any convent—any desert you choose!"

"You *must* marry him," replied Lorenzo, gathering himself up again into cold authoritativeness. Guidobaldo now stood by their side; and Ippolita, desperately wrapping herself round in her mantle, sat down on the wet deck, at first determining to remain there; but the confusion, and the waves washing over the vessel, rendered her station as dan-

gerous as unpleasant; and consigning herself once more to solitude, she passed Guidobaldo, who stood aloof, eyeing her with baleful expression, and returned silently to the cabin.

The bracera was not long in reaching the port for which she now made; and while the necessary repairs were going on, which detained her into the second day, (during which time Ippolita was closely kept from sight,) the weather became calm, and a tolerably fair wind was blowing, when they set sail again for the coast of Istria.

No more dangers or delays awaited them; and in the middle of the fifth night from that on which they had embarked near Rimini, they passed the Capo d'Istria, and running along the coast, at length came to an anchor in an unfrequented bay, in sight of a dismantled watch-tower.

Ippolita and Lorenzo, whose temporary kindness had disappeared, got into

a boat, which Guidobaldo and their inferior associate rowed.

While heaving on the starless waves, guided solely by a light at the summit of the tower, and left to imagine what was the fate appointed her, Ippolita shuddered at her own imaginations, and almost repented their late escape from the black flood upon which they floated.

She addressed her brother more than once, with an enquiry of whither they were going? but he answered only in monosyllables; and Guidobaldo preserved indignant silence.

The sullen splash of their oars was soon the only sound which she heard on that dismal waste of water. The shore was as still and cheerless as the sea.

Having gained some stone steps which advanced into the water, one of the party fastened the boat, and Lorenzo assisted his sister to land. A contradictory feeling, half joy at quitting an element she particularly dreaded, and alarm at what

might await her in a country of which she was not to know the name, made her limbs fail under her: she was forced to accept an arm of each of her tyrants ere she could drag herself forward to the postern of the tower.

The repeated calls and knockings of her companions, were answered from within; and shortly afterwards a stout rustic appeared with a half-lighted torch, at the door. They hurried Ippolita in, and the whole party admitted, the gate was then fastened again. Not many minutes elapsed before they were joined by a robust young man, of a better mien than could have been expected in the inhabitant of such a residence. Guidobaldo saluted him by the name of Alessandro; and enquiring for his mother, was answered, in Italian, that she was getting up; and an instant after, the person in question appeared.

She came, adjusting her dress, and bore the appearance of one who had once

lived in secondary society, and partaken largely of its vanities.

With many remains of beauty, her features preserved an expression of girlish affectation, mixed with great worldly cunning, and the revolting bitterness of disappointed self-love. She threw her arms round Guidobaldo's neck with an ostentatious parade of familiarity, (an embrace he seemed impatiently to endure,) then curiously eyeing Ippolita, drew the former aside, and exchanged a few sentences with him in whispers. He afterwards advanced to his bewildered cousin, introducing the woman as Emilia Sagredo, his foster-mother and friend.

Emilia then asked, with a supple smile, if the Signora chose some supper or preferred retiring to rest. Ippolita gladly chose the latter; and rejoiced to find both these persons Italians, (their attendant having spoken German,) her spirits recovered the chill which struck them,

at sight of the dreary place she believed appointed for her grave.

"I shall claim an audience to-morrow, Madam," said Guidobaldo, haughtily, as he made way for her to pass him. "For your own sake, and that of your kindred, I advise you to consider well, before you give the last blow to my romantic passion. I shall know how to separate my friend here, from those who oppose and outrage me. I will move heaven and earth but *he* shall be seated in the place your uncles expect to occupy!"

Ippolita simply bowed her head, and passed on.

Lorenzo's selfish heart leaped at Guidobaldo's threat, and Ippolita's firmness; for these opened to him a prospect of brighter advantages than he had even anticipated by conquering her aversion to her cousin. Not endeavouring, therefore, to detain her, he too, coldly bade her good night.

When Ippolita reached her apartment,

which was at the top of the tower, she found it scantily furnished, and extremely cold: but she never allowed herself to feel minor evils; and dismissing Emilia, who conducted her to it, before that torrent of compliments was let loose, with which her countenance seemed big, she commended herself to Heaven, and over wearied with many feelings, sunk asleep amid the hollow moan of night winds, and the melancholy cry of sea birds.

Soon after sun-rise the ensuing day, Emilia's voice awakened Ippolita. A serene autumnal morning, shining through the single casement and many loop-holes of her prison-room, and the fresh sea air which entered with it, re-animated Ippolita's courage by invigorating her frame. She quickly arranged her simple habiliments, and finding her way down stairs, was directed by the voice of her brother to the hall in which he sat with Guidobaldo.

They were in close conference over a

wood fire, which the season, and the stone walls of all the apartments in the tower, rendered necessary. A rude breakfast was placed before them, of which they bade her partake; and then both sat silent.

Her scanty meal was soon finished: when it was done, Guidobaldo, who had wrought himself up to the temporary resolution of letting her suffer the punishment of what he termed her ungrateful obstinacy, in hope that she, in her turn, might sue to him, rose, and told Lorenzo he would go and hurry the preparations for their departure.

"And whither go you?" asked Ippolita, turning her troubled eyes upon her brother.

"Back to Italy," he replied, catching [illegible] his head, "whither you never return, but as Guidobaldo's wife."

"Then this is my tomb!" exclaimed Ippolita, with a mixture of despair and resolution.

Guidobaldo's frown, as he drew nearer the door, seemed intended to strike her with the death she anticipated; but he spoke not; — he only bit his lip.

Lorenzo rose. — "Bethink yourself, Ippolita," he said, peevishly; "you will be left here among strangers, without occupation or amusement; never to stir without some one to watch your steps — nor allowed the slightest communication with any of your kindred. You will live and die here, unknown; and all this because you pretend to set up a weak, womanish prepossession, against my authority, and the duty you owe the family cause."

Lorenzo did not in reality mean the extent of what he said; he cheated his conscience when it condemned him for thus tyrannizing over his orphan sister, by the assurance that he intended only to confine her where she was, till Guidobaldo should have done him all the services he expected, or the Emperor paid

into his hands, the important debt she claimed. And caring for Guidobaldo only s an instrument of fortune, he knew that he might in either case, easily find some unsuspected mode of acquainting Giuliano with her retreat; when her enlargement would be the immediate consequence, and his own compact with her fierce lover, apparently preserved.

Guidobaldo, too, had his private policy: and while he enacted the part of a lover soured into hatred by Ippolita's coldness and determined to punish her with eternal captivity, he planned a return by himself, when long confinement might be expected to have lowered her high spirit; and then he would renew the tempting offer of that coveted document, and find her, perhaps, roused to seize such a revenge, upon her brother.

"I was left by my father to the guardianship of my uncle Giuliano," said Ippolita with gentle dignity, after Lo-

renzo had spoken; "he has never wished to influence my conduct towards Guidobaldo.—I lament the pain I give my cousin; and would gladly testify my gratitude to him and his brave father, for the great services they have tried to render us, at so much cost of their blood and estates: but even gratitude does not exact the sacrifice of all our earthly happiness."

Guidobaldo muttered an imprecation, and shot another deadly glance at her.

Ippolita went on. "If I am confined here in the hope that I shall be wearied out, and so give my hand at last, where my heart never can be given, you are mistaken!—And if I am confined here in the hope that I shall finally yield up my claim to the inheritance bequeathed me by my father, you are as much mistaken:—I am bound by sacred obligations not to do either.—On the morning of the battle of the Garigliano, when my dear parent thought he might fall in the

field, he made me promise never to slacken my exertions to recover a debt, which was the only legacy he could leave me and his unhappy followers. I shall be but his steward, for that money, Lorenzo, if I obtain it: a very small portion will be enough for my daily-diminishing desires: the rest belongs to all who have lost and suffered for us.—Thus, then, I never abandon my pursuit of justice in that business, while Heaven grants me life. And for wedding Guidobaldo—'tis impossible!—he himself was witness of the vow I made to the Marquis Valombrosa, on the evening which tore me from *Il bel Deserto*: he heard me declare in the holy name of God, that if I were not to be Valombrosa's wife, I would devote myself to Heaven. And to that vow I adhere in a prison, or at the stake."

"Your martyr spirit shall be well tried, Madam!" said Guidobaldo, bursting at once into vindictive fury, and rushing

from the apartment. — "Let us begone, de Medici!"

Ippolita caught Lorenzo's cloak, as he was obeying the fierce mandate. "Who are the people I am with?" she cried wildly: "for God's sake tell me! if I am to be left solely in the hands of Guidobaldo's creatures—Lorenzo, I care not for my life — but there is a fear — a thought of madness, — (burning blushes covered her face as she spoke,) protect me from that! — consider your own honour is bound up with mine, hateful as I may be to you! — If you have any pity in your breast — any touch of human pity — save me, save me from that!" And now fear alone possessed her cheek as well as her heart; she was pale as ashes.

"Your obstinacy deserves this!" exclaimed Lorenzo, peevishly; "let me go!"

"You cannot, — dare not, be so vile!" exclaimed Ippolita, transported out of herself, wringing her hands, and despe-

rately gazing round, as if for some avenue to escape, or some weapon of self-destruction. "My wrongs — when I am killed by them — will reach the ears of those they cannot reach now — the very winds of heaven will carry them, if man does not — and then infamy and death must pursue you! — What! your sister! — Your father's companion in all his griefs! — You would leave her, in this dismal place, at the mercy of a wretch's lawless, revengeful passion!"

"Guidobaldo goes with me," replied Lorenzo, "and the affair is arranged. The woman here is his foster-mother; and of approved fidelity."

"Yes, faithful to him, doubtless!" exclaimed the frantic Ippolita; "the worse for me! — Guidobaldo is false to you Lorenzo, I'll be sworn he is! he will return — and no friendship for you, no awe of our illustrious name will protect me."

"That you have the Medici blood in

those veins," said Lorenzo imperiously, looking on the swollen and beating arteries of her struggling arms, as she endeavoured to wind them round him, "though it be spurious blood, was enough for me to guard it from pollution. After a dispute just as we were embarking with you, (which had well nigh snapped our bond in twain,) Guidobaldo swore to me, on the faith of a knight, that he will respect the beauty he over-rates so preposterously; and to make this more certain, I have insisted on leaving Renati behind, to watch Guidobaldo's people. You need not seek to tamper with that man's fidelity to me, for it is not to be corrupted: but I give you leave to call upon him as your defender, whenever *real* insult attacks you. — Farewell!"

"One moment more! — Lorenzo! dear Lorenzo!" Ippolita scarcely knew what terms she used while clinging to him. "May he indeed be trusted? — Merciful Heaven, what will become of

me?—O promise never to lose sight of Guidobaldo!—If he disappears from you, hasten back, O hasten, and save me from worse than death!—As you hope for mercy in your dying hour, I charge you promise me this."

Lorenzo, who was just dashing through the door, looked back at this appeal; and seeing her prostrate, with a countenance of mortal paleness, hands locked together, eyes fixed in wild supplication, and large drops of agony pouring from her brow, he gave her a kinder look, and raised her up.

"It is your own fault, Ippolita," he said, "but take comfort!—my affairs—my interest—the interest I mean, of our party, makes me seem unkind. While you are at large, you act under your uncle Giuliano's management, and traverse all that I think right.—I will not suffer any real harm to happen to you; and events may turn up, which may do away the necessity for your detention. Not a word,

however, of such a prospect to Guidobaldo. Attempt nothing desperate! Count your beads and pray, and you may fancy yourself in a nunnery.—Farewell."

He stooped his cheek to the kiss of sudden transport, which the action of the amazed Ippolita tendered. There is something in signs of affection, which soften even the hardest heart, when earnestly given by lips they are conscious they ought to love.

Lorenzo, for the first time in his life, felt his sister's clasp round his neck; and found it hard to shake off. He gently tried to disengage himself; but Ippolita clung to him with greater energy, and bursting into a passion of tears, called him by every tender name expressive of gratitude and hope.

A sudden thought crossed the selfish mind of Lorenzo. He sat down and drew her with him; and as he supported her agitated frame against his shoulder, said in a low voice, "Ippolita, there is yet

a way for you to regain my friendship, and make me drop Guidobaldo's suit. Renati tells me that although Valombrosa's wound was a sore one, his recovery is possible: — Now, if you will engage to win this lover of your's to lead the plot we are hatching against the Gonfaloniere, you shall have liberty, and his hand if he likes it, for your reward. — Nay, liberty beforehand. A word from me, and after we are gone, Renati shall find a way to get you back to *Il bel Deserto*. There will be nothing wonderful in his fidelity yielding to a woman's pleadings; and Guidobaldo, therefore, will have no colour for reproaching me with being accessary to your escape."

Ippolita tore herself out of her brother's arms. — "Leave me! — leave me to my fate!" she cried, averting her face, and motioning him away with her hand, "leave me, Lorenzo, before I say what my situation renders madness. Valombrosa's honour is in his own keeping; and I would

not tempt him even to risk it, though it were to gain all I covet in life!"

"What!" interrupted Lorenzo, starting up also, his features enflaming with anger, "do you call it dishonour to espouse the cause of your family?"

"He thinks it so," replied Ippolita, "at least to the extent you wish; and what conscience refuses, I know, love will never extort from him. Let my uncle Giuliano see him, and if it be true that the Gonfaloniere's policy is leading Florence into French chains, the calm reasonings of that dear uncle may convince Valombrosa that it is patriotism to lend his power and influence to the party which would act on sounder principles. Neither threats nor blandishments can sway Valombrosa — nor would I wish them! Convince him, and you gain him."

"'Tis ambition, not conscience!" exclaimed Lorenzo, angrily, "he looks to future power for himself. His lavish prodigality has no other aim, than to

secure the mob; and when Soderini dies, your disinterested Marquis will find himself just at the right age to step into the vacant dignity.—This dagger shall reach him first!"

Lorenzo struck his sword hilt as he spoke, and bursting open the door, rushed from the room.

Ippolita would have followed, but seeing Guidobaldo through the narrow passage, standing at the entrance of the postern, she retreated into the apartment, where she watched, in breathless agony, the signs of their departure. Their voices, and those of their two humble colleagues, were heard for some time within the tower; then the sounds came from the beach; by degrees were fainter; and at last entirely ceased.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ippolita then concluded they were gone. A strange stillness, at that conclusion, succeeded to her turbulent feelings of the moment before: she was released from a persecutor, but she was also deprived of a protector! She was left to an indefinite term of cheerless confinement, without a single object of interest or occupation, with which to vary her monotonous existence; and days, weeks, months, years, might pass without her ever hearing of the persons dearest to her soul.

Alas! what would be *their* feelings while ignorant of her fate? It was in vain that Ippolita sought to moderate the anguish with which she considered these

things, by enumerating the unexpected consolations she had just received from the hand of Heaven. Valombrosa lived, — her uncle was at liberty — her brother had appointed one of his own followers to protect her from personal insult; and he had even allowed her to see that her union with Guidobaldo was a secondary consideration with him; that in short, a rupture between those confederates (a thing by no means unlikely) might induce him to give her truer friends a clue to find her.

As Ippolita recapitulated all that had passed between her and this self-willed brother, she wept to think how unworthy he discovered himself of the name he bore. To the selfish and tyrannical oppressiveness which his former conduct exemplified, was added a cowardly chicanery, which withered springing affection, by taking away the only soil it can root in, truth and honour.

Guidobaldo, too, had showed his fami-

liarity with deception, when he offered her the very document, with the promise of withholding which, he had bribed Lorenzo to aid his lawless scheme. They were, indeed, fit coadjutors; but they were her kinsmen!

How brightly, then, shone the idea of Valombrosa (dimmed only by a speck or two of human imperfection) in contrast with such dark images! That assurance of unsullied integrity, which he had given her in their last interview, throbbed joyfully at her heart, and was as firmly trusted to, as though uttered by the tongue of an angel. And while she believed him still the best and noblest of mankind, she could think of his mental griefs with tearful resignation, and his bodily sufferings with hope.

So important a life, she thought, must be preserved for a long career of usefulness: but even while that persuasion supported her failing soul, she felt it needed confirmation; and she determined

to bend all her powers of conciliation to win from Renati some account of Valombrosa's state, and, if possible, some intelligence of Rosalia. For though of course the man had not actually entered *Il bel Deserto*, if he lurked in its neighbourhood, he must have heard from the peasantry numerous details about their beloved Lord and his sister. And as Renati had reached the port from which Lorenzo and his companions embarked only just as they were leaving it, and as his journey was evidently not made so circuitously as theirs, he must have remained long enough in Tuscany to acquire satisfactory information.

To allure him, therefore, into conversation on this subject, was a thing to desire; and Ippolita thus created for herself in a moment, or rather a gracious Providence presented to her, a pursuit, —an object for hope, even in that sterile situation where it seemed as if neither pursuit nor hope could bloom.

Her contemplations were interrupted by the entrance of Emilia; who came with a smile of dissembling courtesy on her lips, bringing several pieces of very fine linen, and costly silk, which she laid down, and spread out before Ippolita; telling her that they were left for her use by her generous Lord, (who had brought them from the last port they touched at,) commanding her to take the Signora's orders for the fashion of their make.

Ippolita cast a look of mingled astonishment and disregard on the woman speaking to a wretched prisoner about the fashion of garments: but as Emilia pressed her for a reply, adding a compliment on the luxuriant beauty of her shape, she pushed the mocking vanities away, and said with momentary impatience, "Let me have what is sufficient for decency; — 'tis all I want." And she arose and walked to a window.

The woman officiously followed.

"*I* would be alone!" said Ippolita, in her usual gentle tone.

"Then the Signora must do me the favour of returning to her apartment above," replied Emilia, disguising her pique under an air of complacent acquiescence. "My orders are never to leave you alone, Madam, unless you are at the top of the tower, with the door fastened. When you are below, I must be allowed the honour of becoming your companion: and, when you walk in the garden, either Renati, or my son, must follow your steps."

"What an existence!" exclaimed Ippolita piteously; then recovering her firmness, added, "You shall have no opposition from me in this disagreeable office; only allow me solitude and my own thoughts: — at present, at least. — I am ready to attend you."

She sighed as she spoke; and that sigh, accompanied as it was by an air of touching resignation, checked the in-

tended remonstrance of Emilia, who only courtesyed, and asked whether the Signora would choose to look at their garden.

"Though it lies so close to the sea," she said, "and though Alessandro likes fishing so much better than planting, he contrives to make it keep us in vegetables. And there are still a few flowers, and a few grapes left."

"Suffer me to pass the next hours without any distraction of my thoughts; for I have much to think of!" said Ippolita, putting her hand on her throbbing forehead. "I will join you in the evening, and look round my prison." She smiled faintly, and slowly ascending the stairs, was ushered into her cheerless apartment; where, however, she now found a fire, and some additional articles of furniture.

"I am obliged to you," she said, with that sweet graciousness which had formerly unlocked for her so many hearts.

But Emilia's was that of a faded beauty, disappointed in many an ambitious aim, through a life of coarse coquetry not always free from reproach, and the very charms of Ippolita were to such a woman causes of envious dislike. She had, however, a part to play, for the sake of her foster-child, whom she believed she loved, because she was proud of his admired exterior, and expected marvels from his bounty; and she therefore renewed her offers of service, with obsequious civility. Declining further refreshment till their early supper hour, Ippolita once more agreed to quit her solitude, when Emilia should bring her evening meal; and the latter again courtesying, departed.

When she was gone, Ippolita drew nigh the single window of her cell, and opening it, looked out. The first object her eye sought, was the bracera in which she believed her brother and Guidobaldo were embarked, and as she saw it stretch-

ing out to sea, her heart bounded with joy.

For a long time she followed it with her eyes, as if to assure herself that it was really destined for Italy, — for that dear Italy from which she was cut off by the very waves that were bearing them to their country. Then recalling her long and vain gaze, she looked at the surrounding scene.

Directly opposite spread the green expanse of the Adriatic, beyond which lay Venice. To her left, the advancing coast broken into bays and projecting in headlands intercepted her downward view towards the Mediterranean; but to the right she could discover afar off, the same smiling intermixture of verdant acclivities and of glittering towns, which she had noticed the first day of their voyage, and which she now looked at with fonder longing, and the wish to think that there must be protection near so many habitations of her kind.

But as her eye returned to the home view, that credulous thought sunk: the dark tower stood alone, with not even a fisher's hut within reach of sight or sound from its walls. Her apartment was at its dizziest height; and as her eye plunged thence, to the bare sands below, not even a leaf of ivy, or a single moss of any kind, gave promise of assisting the descent of desperate adventure. She sighed, gave a tearful glance at Heaven, and retired from the window.

She then took up some materials for female works, which were ostentatiously placed on a table near her fire, and she thought, with a beating heart, of the library at *Il bel Deserto*, and the animating scene from its window: above all, she thought of the dear and intellectual society she had enjoyed there. A full tide of tears then came to her relief: she wept long, and abundantly; after which her mind became more composed, and she was able to think over the best means

of rendering her present residence supportable, and of conciliating the good-will of one or more of her gaolers.

At the appointed hour, Emilia re-appeared with fruit and bread, and some vino di Santi Martiri, which she equalled to its rival, the vino de Ré; assuring Ippolita, that Alessandro had brought it himself from the vineyard, all the way across the Monte della Vena, though it cost him a two days' journey at the risk of his own and his horse's neck, over that rugged road.

Ippolita was familiar with the sight of both these celebrated wines, at the table of Valombrosa, and she remembered that they were said to be the product of a single district close to Trieste; she therefore calculated that she must now be on the Istrian coast, midway between tha port and Fiume.

She was then in the dominions of the Emperor, the former friend of her father! This circumstance might be essentially

serviceable to her: she therefore determined, in the event of her escape, to throw herself at once into the hands of the constituted authorities of the first German town she should reach, and in her own respected name, demand a safe conduct to the Imperial residence.

To have discovered the geographical situation of her prison, was of importance, as it might guide her steps, were she so fortunate as to find means of flying from it: inspirited by this unexpected success, she made Emilia sit down while she ate some fruit, and asked a few seemingly unimportant questions.

Her frugal meal dispatched, and her companion's self-love unintentionally propitiated by some remarks upon that superior air which seemed so little suited to the dreary retirement in which Ippolita saw her placed, they descended the staircase together, and passing through a side passage to a smaller door than that of the postern, went out into the garden.

This was a rambling piece of ground open to the sea, and sloping down to a low embattled wall on the shore; a higher wall behind, and still higher hedges of wild aloe and fig on each side, defended it from intrusion by land. A few flowering shrubs were scantily mixed with the fruit-trees and pot-herbs which constituted its chief ornaments: and except a very fine old chesnut-tree shading a bank purple with lavender, the place offered no attractions to taste. Yet Ippolita seated herself under the umbrageous boughs of the chesnut, refreshed with the smell of the wild sage which grows so profusely on the inland hills, and soothed by the tranquillity of evening.

The stars appearing one by one in the fading sky, the washing of the tide against the shore, and the low rustling of leaves above her head, would at another time have invited her to melancholy contemplation; but now she turned to Emilia, and as she raised her eye to the

high and grey tower, asked for what purpose it was built.

Emilia's answer to that and many other questions too mildly put not to win a little complacency, informed Ippolita that her prison was one of those numerous watch-towers, formerly erected by private persons on the shores of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, to defend their estates from the descent of the Ottoman pirates, and that having become comparatively useless from the growth of large towns in its vicinity, it was now preserved as a beacon for the use of fishermen, (vassals to its owner,) who went to catch gatto in a neighbouring gulf.

Ippolita could not extort the name of its proprietor from her wary companion; but she gradually discovered that he was an Austrian nobleman, under whom Alessandro had served in the confederate war, and who had given him the idle post of keeping up the tower, with a

small annuity, as recompence for some service rendered him in the field.

Emilia more than once hinted that her son's early indiscretions had sunk him to so inferior a station; and at the same time gave Ippolita to understand, that she was his companion solely to gratify her dearer foster-son the Signor Guidobaldo.

From all this, Ippolita gathered that her detention on his estate was quite unknown to its German proprietor, and that Guidobaldo had selected this situation simply because he could place in it a creature of his own.

To none of these conclusions, however, did Ippolita give utterance. She was careful not to alarm her talkative companion, (whose vanity happily formed a counterpoise to her cunning,) and she listened with the seeming air of mere courtesy, never trusting her eyes from the shade of their dropping lashes.

Emilia was obviously more pleased

with talking of herself, than curious to inquire into the history or feelings of others; and though she artfully mingled Guidobaldo's praises with every thing she said, her discourse was principally made up of the stories of her youth, when she was waiting-maid to a lady of the first chamber of the Duchess of Mantua, and forfeited her place because my Lord Duke eulogised her fine complexion. From this tale, the waning coquette proceeded to narrate how she lost the hand of the Prince Albamonte's grand falconer, from the folly of listening to the Prince's fifth cousin, a gay libertine, who, after all, had no honourable thought; and she added, by way of moral, "Ah! my young lady, accept my advice, and don't set too great a price on your beauty: Take a good offer when it comes; and be sure you will never meet with a handsomer nor a truer gentleman than the Signor Guidobaldo; and not often one with better blood in his veins."

"If I can resist that handsome and true Signor himself, when he pleads," said Ippolita, trying to avert impertinent importunity by gentleness, "how do you expect me to yield merely to his advocate? You will oblige me by silence on this subject. I thank you for your attendance, and would now return into the house."

She rose as she spoke, and Emilia yielding to the tranquil dignity with which she enveloped herself in her veil, as if to forbid further conversation, respectfully followed.

Ippolita retired immediately to her own chamber, where she sat long, buried in deep and anxious thought.

That one conversation with Emilia convinced her that from such a woman any idea of succour would be folly, and that therefore it would better suit her purpose to lull her into security, by never attempting to interest or influence her. Vanity and avidity were developed as

the main springs of Emilia's character, by the various incidents she told of her past life; and it was therefore evident, that while she could feel of importance to Guidobaldo Alviano, by ministering to his vengeance, or while she could reckon upon an ample reward from him for this temporary banishment in his service, Ippolita had sufficient experience of human nature to know that compassion would plead in vain for *her* enlargement. There was nothing left, therefore, but to win on the good-will of Renati, who might perhaps, as an adherent of the Medici, find it harder to resist the pleadings of Piero de Medici's orphan daughter.

"And if he is not to be won," she said to herself, after long and agitated reflection, "am I to end my days here?" and she looked round her narrow apartment, where the dying embers, and a lamp just extinguishing, cast quivering and ghastly gleams over every article of

its sordid furniture. "Let none link themselves to one who bears the fatal name of Medici!" she added wildly; "it is a name accursed. Untimely deaths, exile, and imprisonment, are the destiny of my race! O Valombrosa, and I would have wished thee linked to such a fate! O no, no! live on, live on! and not for me! We were not born under the same stars, and must not unite. My bleeding path lies through dark and stormy wildernesses; thine through light, and fragrance, and joy!"

She gushed into tears as she spoke; and while the instant recollection of Valombrosa's late extreme sufferings came over her, she felt that in reproaching him with happiness, she was querulously increasing the load of her sorrows, by so separating all their sympathies.

Ashamed of such weakness, and alarmed at the almost imperceptible advances of selfish sensibility, she threw herself on her knees, and repeated her nightly sup-

plication for firmer and nobler feelings; after which, she retired to her pallet, and closed her eyes for the second night under the roof of strangers and enemies. Intent on the hope of winning some intelligence from Renati, for many successive days and weeks Ippolita forced herself to endure the frequent society of Emilia, within the tower, that she might, with less suspicion, converse with the former in the garden. Alessandro spent most part of his time in fishing, perhaps to keep watch by sea; but Renati was either fond of gardening, or glad to seek any occupation to vary the wearisome life he had in common with the other inhabitants of the watch-tower. Ippolita gradually assumed, and indeed felt the same inclination; and though the season of the year was little favourable to such pursuits, (being now the end of November,) she contrived to make employment for herself in removing the fallen leaves, and nursing a few lingering flowers.

She often loitered near Renati, while he was more usefully occupied in protecting and planting winter vegetables, to converse with him on subjects of interest to them both; the past hardships and present views of her exiled family.

Renati always answered explicitly and respectfully; but he had such a stern look of resolute fidelity to the trust reposed in him, that it was long ere she durst venture to tempt him into the slightest disobedience.

To ascertain the exact situation of those at *Il bel Deserto*, when this man left its neighbourhood, was the object of her fervent wishes, and she one day insinuated the question with an air of apprehensive entreaty, which might have melted less stubborn principles.

Renati rested upon his spade, and mistaking the meaning of the action with which she accidentally refastened the costly clasp of her bracelet, said sullenly, "You had better not make me your enemy,

Lady, by showing that you think I am to be bought. I swore by the cross, to the Signor Lorenzo, never to answer one of your questions about the Marquis Valombrosa — never to aid or abet your escape — or to wink at another person's assisting in it — and never to see you affronted or ill-used by any one. Now, as you expect me to keep the last part of my oath, don't try to make me break the first. But you may try — I am like this flint." — And he struck his spade upon one, while speaking.

Ippolita fixed her eyes on him: — that look read him thoroughly. She sighed, and bowing her head, said, "Well Renati, I honour your fidelity, but I think it a principle ill-applied here. To keep me in such cruel uncertainty about the situation of friends deservedly dear to me, is adding torture to imprisonment. Be it so, however, since it is Heaven's will!"

The gentle emphasis which she laid upon the word heaven, and the air of

self-denying dignity with which she moved away, touched the hardy soldier more than her late timid supplications: he lifted his cap as she passed, saying, "I am very sorry, Lady, that my Lord thinks it right to order this; but it is my duty to obey, and not to question him — and the Marquis Valombrosa is his stoutest enemy at Florence."

Ippolita noticed Renati's blunt expression of concern, with an inclination of her head, and a watery smile; then retired to the lower end of the garden, where she sat down on the embattled wall, and sunk into thought.

That thought, naturally turned first to Heaven, acknowledging the command to submission, and imploring for grace to obey it; and while she felt the violent pulsation of her roused heart gradually abating, she owned the salutary effect of time and trials upon human character. At sixteen she would have rooted Renati's prejudice against Valombrosa, by vain

arguments, and have given way to immoderate lamentations, because disappointed of her dearest hope. At two-and-twenty she listened in silence; she wept; but she submitted.

Such is the progress of reason! — It becomes stronger from more frequent conflicts with the passions. In our infancy complaint is almost spontaneously indulged, because by it we get our bodily ills alleviated, and our wants satisfied. This circumstance so connects the two ideas of complaint and relief, that experience alone can disunite them. Thus, in youth, when we are struck by any calamity, we give loose to lamentation; but when we have reached maturity, we complain seldom, though we pray oftener; and we do so, because we no longer expect relief from any other hand than that of God.

At this moment, Ippolita resolutely resisted the bias of fond affection, which leads us to imagine the worst, when the

life most precious to us, is placed in danger: and still as she found the arms of reason fail in that hard combat, she sought the succours of religion.

Reason assured her, that if Renati's intelligence had not been favourable to her wishes, and adverse to those of Lorenzo, the latter would not have expressed such vexation at it: and religion taught her, that if the Good are prematurely withdrawn from this world, it is, that they may the earlier enjoy the blessedness of another.

There were many rational grounds also for hope of her own release ere the lapse of many months. If her uncle Giuliano were indeed free, (and Renati's testimony confirmed Guidobaldo's truth in that business,) and Valombrosa in life, both their efforts would be separately or jointly exerted to discover her place of concealment, and to release her. — The same event might occur from a disagreement

between Guidobaldo and her brother, the knot of whose friendship was slack enough to admit of being untied by any great advantage privately offered to either; or some unexpected mode of escape might providentially present itself when she least hoped it.

As her eye wandered over the grey stretch of sea, and she tried to fancy she could discern the outline of the Venetian coast beyond, a vague feeling that by this way she was to escape, took possession of her mind. Yet none but fishers' boats came near enough the shore for her to communicate with them; and she was so carefully watched both within and without doors, that she never had a single moment alone, except when removed from all possibility of attracting attention, in her unscaleable chamber.

Still the fancy remained; and willing to soothe herself even with delusions, she courted its stay.

Having decided that by making fruitless attempts to gain over her gaolers, she should only rouse them into greater watchfulness, and aware that she had nothing to tempt them with, in opposition to the rewards or promises of her fierce oppressor, Ippolita determined to go on, as if acquiescing in her destiny. She therefore withdrew more from the company of Emilia, which disgusted her, because that woman's conversation was so mixed with personal flattery and impertinent urgings of Guidobaldo's suit; and she no longer stopped beyond a few moments, to converse with Renati, as she took her melancholy, at last mechanical walk in the now leafless garden.

Without books, or means of exercising any of those elegant arts which she had acquired under the eye of her uncle Giuliano, and practised in the delightful circle at *Il bel Deserto*; denied every implement for writing; she could vary her hours only by the change from rest to

exercise, from the homely employment of spinning flax, to the absorbing one of infinite retrospection.

How many pleasing images of childhood and youth, rose to her memory at these times, as if ascending from the depths of some dark sea, where they had sunk and lain forgotten! What crowds of buried hours in later years, revived again!

Ippolita lived anew through the stormy period of her father's life, and the checquered yet gentler period of her uncle Giuliano's protection; and once more she breathed the air, and heard the familiar sounds of *Il bel Deserto*.

In Florence she had first tasted the exquisite delight of loving Valombrosa and his sister: but it was in their country residence that affection was perfected: so that with *Il bel Deserto* all her dearest recollections were associated. She would sit on the low flinty wall of the watch-tower garden, thinking over those vanished

days, till the naked beach before her, the cheerless sea, and distant sail, — the withering herbage around, and the barren hills behind, were all lost in the dream of memory and love.

The portico at *Il bel Deserto* illuminated by the crystal lamp of heaven, Rosalia smiling under it, Valombrosa's graceful figure just touched by that pure light while he leaned against a pillar repeating a line of Petrarch, or murmuring as he held and unconsciously struck his sister's lute a few untaught notes of such wild and rich sweetness that the ear thirsted for more, formed this waking vision!

Sometimes that voice, in the delightful tone of every-day intercourse, came over the trance of Ippolita, as though it actually entered her sense; and then she would start from her dream in a wild transport — alas! not to be realized! — tears, bitter and long-flowing tears, followed.

There were moments when her sick soul pined so painfully for one tone of that dear voice, one look of that beloved face, that it seemed as though she could not live, unless its yearning was gratified; but we *must* live, suffer as we may! Let not those sufferings therefore be deemed light merely because the sufferer lives on: Ippolita did not die, yet she experienced many moments bitter as death itself.

Without visible means of distracting her thoughts, she was unavoidably led to the contemplation of one subject, and as that was the only one she could couple with the possibility of future happiness, it was natural that to it she should turn, from present weariness and disgust.

Many were the conjectures she formed upon the nature of Valombrosa's secret distress, which not even the bold assertions of Lorenzo, (though these were in some measure justified by the character of their times, and of their country,)

could make her for an instant believe were connected with guilt.

Imagination grew out of imagination, but none kept root: they rose and withered! Ippolita could but pray and hope that in conformity with the effect he said was already produced on it by time, every day would ameliorate his grief; and that whatever might be her fate, peace and prosperity would await him.

She dwelt upon the soft image of Rosalia, with melting tenderness; and while she thought of Prince Angelo Rossano, and put together a few simple incidents scarcely noticed at the moment, some touching visions flitted before her. Cold, indeed, is the heart which has never built an airy castle for another! Besides this occupation of reverie, Ippolita made a second supply the place of books: she tasked her memory for all the passages of favourite authors read at *Il bel Deserto;*

and then again she would seem to hear the voice of Valombrosa.

Or she would remember how often its peculiar depth, and sweetness, and expression, would strike her, when he took the volume even from Rossano, whose tones at other times appeared remarkably soft and agreeable.

From recollecting the compositions of poets, her own ruder attempts (for she inherited the family facility of clothing their thoughts in rhyme) by degrees returned to her mind, and prompted her to pour out her present feelings in similar strains.

This habit became at once her solace and her occupation; and the tears she shed while repeating her sad elegies, were so many reliefs to her burthened heart.

Often did her muse take a nobler flight, and waft her spirit to the throne of Eternal Wisdom and Goodness; and it was thence she derived real and lasting

comfort. But even thither the image of Valombrosa accompanied her; and the recollection of his fervent piety, a piety so beautiful in the plenitude of youth and health and joy, would mingle in her aspirations after higher things, and alarm her, lest even such a recollection at such a time were sacrilegious.

One day while censuring herself for this frailty, some stanzas returned to her memory, which had arisen almost as involuntarily at the period of their composition. Their scene was the chapel of *Il bel Deserto*, where so often the heaven-rapt soul of Valombrosa won her's back to earth; and she repeated them to herself with a compunctious feeling of merited suffering.

" O conscious heart! why beat'st thou so,
These sacred walls within?
Why must thy heav'n-aspiring glow
Be quench'd, perhaps, in sin?

" For is't not sin, to kneel and pray
With wand'ring mind and eyes,

Yielding thy better aim a prey
  To aught beneath the skies?

" What though he's kneeling by thy side
  With deeply-earnest air;
Though music pour devotion's tide
  In his scarce-murmur'd prayer;

" Though all on that dear brow be drest
  In beams of stainless youth;
And all within that gen'rous breast
  Be tenderness and truth;

" Though as his sightless sister's form
  On his fond arm is staid,
Her looks proclaim that bosom warm
  For her and goodness made;

" Though pure as light his soft eyes lend
  A holier fire to mine;
Yet is it sin his thought to blend
  With thought of things divine."

Ippolita might have added, and is it not sinful to admire so vividly a creature's adoration of his God! — a creature's gratitude for blessings bestowed! — a creature's supplication for pardon of sin! — Are not all these things but so many acts of bounden duty and of reasonable ser-

vice? Alas! how imperfect is human nature! The tender, who renounce as follies, those idols of the world, wealth, distinction, luxury, and pleasure, have *their* idols in some few objects which they too fondly love, and too highly exalt above others; and for this idolatry, as much as for that grosser sort, there *is* a chastisement! That chastisement Ippolita was suffering now, in her removal from the places and persons to which she had allowed her heart so to attach itself; and acknowledging the justice of the correction, she bowed, and submitted.

CHAPTER XX.

IPPOLITA's submission was far different from inactive endurance. She ceased not to consider the means of escape, and to pursue a plan for that purpose.

The only one which offered itself to her mind with any degree of hope, depended on so many lucky chances for success, that while resolving to attempt it, she yet sighed over its precariousness. Her sex and situation rendered it madness to think of breaking her prison unassisted; and she was so entirely debarred all personal or epistolary intercourse with persons beyond her prison walls, that to make her case known to them seemed nearly impossible. Yet it was towards that mode of conveying

information to her friends, that she looked for deliverance.

If she could make her needle supply the place of a pen, and get her situation so stated, to any passing vessel, it was probable that some one there, might be sufficiently interested by such an incident, as either to seek her themselves, or to forward the document to her relations named in it.

Inspirited by the bare possibility of this, she soon wrought as many lines upon the silk of her handkerchief as told her name and situation, directing the finder where to seek her uncle the Cardinal, or her friend Prince Angelo Rossano. Valombrosa's name she would not couple with that of a Medici; yet she thought, with tearful tenderness, that he, if still in life, would be the first to hasten to her rescue.

This work she carefully secreted about her person, while it was in progress; and when completed, as one of her employ-

ments was the construction of little osier baskets, she enclosed it in one of these, defending it as well as she could against the admission of water, and trusting that Providence would ordain it to reach some benevolent hand.

This part of her task done, her next was to watch the appearance of every sail, the sound of every oar, which approached the coast. Few, alas! did approach; except fishers'-boats, the crews of which were too ignorant to read even their own mixed language, and too stupid, if they had done so, to concern themselves in her fate: and when a vessel of better appearance came within possible reach, it uniformly happened when her gaolers were all at their different posts, consequently sure to detect and baffle any attempt at conveying intelligence to it.

As the winter advanced, however, their vigilance relaxed, with their belief of its being less necessary. Fewer vessels navigated the Adriatic, at that season; the

days were shorter; and the weather rendered it impossible for Ippolita to live so much in the open air as she had done when she first came to the tower.

She now passed the principal part of the shortened days in her remote chamber; but no longer wrapt in melancholy abstraction. She sat eagerly watching every speck on the horizon of the sea, awaiting with throbbing pulses its gradual developement into the shape she wished; noting its advance with palpitating anxiety, or its adverse direction with sickening disappointment. And sometimes, when the fortunate moment seemed come, and she was on the point of casting down her freighted basket, the sight of one of her gaolers on the sands, or the sound of their voices at a window below, would check her hand, and give her up to despair.

Thus closed the year 1509.

Another year was entered into, and advancing; and Ippolita had already

passed four dreary months in her prison. How agonizing was this period!

Perpetual fear of Guidobaldo's return, kept her in a state of destroying agitation which no reasonings had power to quiet. She frequently questioned Emilia and Renati upon the situation of her brother and her fierce lover; but neither of them would give her any satisfaction.

Renati would talk to her of the past, but never of the present or the future, when connected with his Lord; and it was only in temporary moments of petulance that Emilia betrayed the little information Ippolita could draw from her. The latter had found it necessary to distance this presuming woman by absenting herself from her society as much as possible; and it was only now and then, therefore, that she collected from her angry sallies, that Guidobaldo's absence was prolonged solely by the fierceness of the war between the Venetians and the Confederates, and that he would seize

the first interval of truce, to return and try more decisive methods than he had done, of obtaining her hand.

Terrified more and more by these insinuations, and sometimes unable to support the anguish of uncertainty about Valombrosa, Ippolita was often tempted to cast her precious memorial into the sea, at all hazards, and so risk it at once, whether there were or were not any vessel near enough to observe and to pick it up.

Such desperate adventure, however, was stayed by the consciousness that her only hope of release depended upon a prudent use of this document. Were that lost, and she obliged to frame another, Emilia's suspicions must be awakened by the manifest disproportion between the small quantity of materials daily afforded her for sewing, and for basket work, and the articles produced. This consideration checked Ippolita's rashness, even while her apprehensions increased of future

insult and outrage from Guidobaldo. She had no refuge but in Renati, and to him she at length applied, as he moodily dogged her steps one evening, in the watch-tower garden.

When they reached the lower end of this joyless spot, instead of walking apart from him, she drew near, and repeated the many threats implied by Emilia, beseeching him to remember his promise to her brother; and endeavouring to persuade him that he could only keep that promise, by removing her from a place where all but himself were the creatures of Guidobaldo.

Renati's obstinate fidelity was not to be staggered, even by this direct appeal to his protection. He renewed the assurance of guarding her from every real evil; engaging never to leave the door of her chamber while Guidobaldo remained; yet censuring her suspicions of one, for whose good faith his master

Lorenzo answered with his honour and character.

In vain Ippolita represented the inadequacy of one defender, however loyal and brave that defender might be, when opposed to the power and machinations of several. Renati was not to be convinced that she had any worse evil to dread from her cousin than passionate importunities; and with the blind prepossession of a man who deems every one praiseworthy who attaches themselves to his own political party, bluntly told her, he thought her brother justified in using some coercion to make her marry the firmest adherent of her family.

Having said this, he precipitately retired to another part of the garden.

Ippolita remained for a moment or two pierced by disappointment, and stung with justifiable indignation. Thoughts of more immediate interest, of horrors from which there might be no

escape, gradually frenzied her brain, till she felt that there wanted but the sudden appearance of Guidobaldo himself, to make her plunge, desperate and mad, into the sea before her.

The far, far off sound of a convent bell recalled this wandering intellect; and melting into tears of contrite sorrow, she cast one piteous look to heaven, as if to ask forgiveness and express reliance, and resumed her mournful walk.

As she continued slowly to traverse the thawing path, now beginning to show the peeping heads of early flowers, she wept at each return of that melancholy bell, imaging the peace of those sacred walls whence its sound proceeded, and vainly wishing that ere she had known Valombrosa, she had sought shelter from all life's trials in some such refuge.

By the time the vesper bell had ceased, Ippolita became sensible to the increasing chilliness of the hour: returning to

the house, she left her ignoble companions to the keen excitement of cards, and ascended to her chamber.

Emilia locked her in, and left her, with a sarcasm and a compliment united. Deep and successive were now Ippolita's trances of thought. She remained at her opened casement, unconscious of the piercing air, and heedless of "the moon walking in all her brightness," over the clear level of the water.

She was sitting thus painfully absorbed, when the sound of a male voice running through the first notes of a Neapolitan air, well known in other days, made her start up. She looked out, and saw a slight skiff coasting downwards, with two or three persons on board. One of these persons was singing to himself the following ballad:

"Blow, blow from my country thou fresh-springing
breeze,
And waft me that air so familiar of yore!

Flow, flow from my country ye fast-ebbing seas,
O bring me some wave that has wash'd her green shore!

"Ye rough-kissing breezes, ah, say as ye blow,
Come the sighs of my children to hallow this cheek?
And you, rolling surges, amid your dark flow,
Do the tears of my mother her prodigal seek?

"If true the blest vision, on gales from my home,
Now give me to sigh forth my penitent breath!
And back to my country may ocean's white foam
Bear the exile, that ne'er must return but in death!"

If Ippolita's ear lost many of these words, her memory supplied them; and if the singer's thoughtless chaunt denied them the power of touching other hearts, her sad associations with those words and that music, made the song all-powerful over her.

These lines had been written by her father, and were tinctured with much of his own melancholy, perhaps self-accus-

ing, spirit. At his request she had sung them to him not long before their fatal wreck on the Garigliano; they had made him weep at that time, and consequently since then she had never ventured to give them breath.

Each note as it came, unlocked another and another cell of direful memories! The unburied forms of her father and of Fabio Orsini, followed by a phantom train of humbler friends long since vanished from the earth, arose before her, drowning her in tears, and causing all her present griefs to melt into air.

It was not till the song had ceased some time, and till the rippling of the water round the keel of the small vessel was distinctly heard opposite the tower, (for the night was as still as it was beautiful,) that an idea of using this opportunity for her own advantage, flashed across her mind.

She flew instantly to the secret depo-

sitory of her treasured basket, and first waving her white veil from the window, with her finger pressed upon her lip, to indicate silence, she flung the basket, with all her strength, into the sea. Happily it did not drop upon the beach; it fell upon the waves — it floated!

What was her emotion?—Too troubled to be called joyful, she saw the skiff steering instantaneously in the direction she wished. The heavens shone on her purpose, seemingly with blest augury; for they were thick with the brightest stars; and the full-moon illuminated the whole expanse of sea and shore.

The person that rivetted her attention (he who sang) was evidently a soldier; for now and then the gleaming of armour was visible in the moon-shine, as his movements disordered his large military-cloak. His voice was utterly unknown to her: but though the air he sang was common, and though her father's verses when adapted to that air, had become

nearly as popular as itself, and consequently might be sung by enemies as well as friends, she ventured to hope that one of that dear father's former adherents was now brought by Providence to her succour.

The agony of a moment or two, while watching the rapid drifting of her freighted basket and the actions of those in the pursuing boat, was over-paid to Ippolita, by seeing the former at last seized, and drawn out of the water by the soldier. She saw this person cut asunder the osier bands with which it was secured, and having carefully searched it further, at length unfolded the momentous handkerchief.

The skiff was all this time advancing nearer the shore: it was evidently making for the watch-tower!

Bewildered with hope, with fear, with gratitude, with impatience of suspense, and winged by the imagination that her rescue might depend upon the mere cir-

cumstance of her being within instant reach of the friendly strangers, she flew to the door, and for the first time recollected that it was locked as usual. Every feeling was revulsed by the shock; and she sunk down overpowered with a panic belief, that escape was hopeless.

Even if the stranger should come to investigate her story, it was in her gaolers' power to prevent him from seeing her, and to terrify him from any violent attempt to that effect, by a display of dangerous resistance.

In short, some vain contest for her sake, might ensue, and this benevolent unknown, fall a sacrifice to his humanity.

These distracting thoughts were soon increased by the sound of knockings at the postern gate. Again she hurried to the window, and though she could not see who knocked, in consequence of a projecting arch above the gate, she remarked that the two rowers were still in the skiff, consequently that he who

had landed, must be that soldier upon whom her hopes were placed.

No one answered this man's call, for some time: at length Alessandro thrust his head from a side window, lower down, and demanded who was there?

"Valentino," replied the other, in good Italian, "I bring pleasant news." A recognition from Alessandro, uttered with something like gladness, with the desire that he would wait awhile, followed this answer: he quitted the window, and Ippolita first heard him hurry to his mother's chamber, and then go down stairs.

This stranger then, was one of these people's accomplices! He was coming purposely to join them!—Most likely was a messenger from Guidobaldo!—His forerunner, perhaps!

Alas, how had she mistaken the motives which actuated him, after he had read that sad appeal wrought with so many tears!—Armed with that witness of her

attempt at escape, he was come, most likely, to straighten her miserable bounds! perhaps to tell her that Valombrosa was no more; or that Lorenzo was fallen, and Guidobaldo therefore freed, even from the weak restraint imposed by her brother's regard to family honour!

Who was to protect her then from his fierce revenge?— Alas! not Renati; for what could one man effect, when opposed by a growing horde of wretches?

Almost stupified by the bitterness of disappointment, and the excess of terror, she stood for awhile in the midst of her apartment, motionless as a statue.

Recalled at last to herself by the hurried sounds from below, of opening and closing doors, of welcome and gratulation, she drew once more to the casement, and saw the boat which had brought this Valentino, stretching out to sea again, without him. Her heart died within her at the sight; for thus was another added to the list of her oppressors.

Momentarily expecting the appearance of this person, and winding up her spirit to sustain the rude encounter of probable insult or menace from him, she sat down on her bed, alternately listening to hear whether her enraged gaolers were coming, or ejaculating an agonized appeal to heaven.

One of her expectations was realized: Emilia presented herself. The natural violence of a soured temper, commonly restrained by motives of interest and vanity, now broke out: she accused Ippolita of dissimulation and ingratitude; reproaching her with having assumed the appearance of resignation, when she was in reality employed in preparing means for effecting her escape, and consequently of ruining those who would be condemned for having left such means within her reach.

" But here end all your opportunities, Madam, of acting so ungratefully to one who has been so indulgent as I have

been!" added Emilia, "This window shall be so barricadoed that scarcely shall either light or air get through it; and for means of executing another such ingenious device as this, (holding up the unfortunate handkerchief,) they never shall be your's again.—No more work!—No more walking without me by your side. I'll take care to keep my *fair deposit* safe, till my dear Lord comes, and then let him look to it himself. If he would take my advice, (she smiled as maliciously as contemptuously while she added after a moment's survey of Ippolita's person,) he would not stumble at a little repugnance!—Repugnance, indeed, when such a handsome and noble gentleman is concerned, and you not born in lawful wedlock either!"

A glance from Ippolita's eye interrupted the lawless speed of the woman's tongue, or rather changed its course: her complexion deepened as much with anger as with confusion; yet she resumed.—

"Don't fancy, Signora, that I watch you for the lucre of gain! I do it out of pure love to my dear Guidobaldo. Neither Alessandro nor I want reward now. Valentino came to bring us news of such a legacy, that now I may hold up my head with some of the proudest. What a mercy it was, that he should just have crossed over to Trieste, and be boating it down to us! — If this precious piece of mischief had been found by any other, than a son of my own, what would have been the consequence!—Surely a blessed Providence must have ordered it!"

"Providence!" exclaimed Ippolita, shuddering, "how dare you profane that sacred name?"

Again Emilia burst forth in a torrent of invective, great part of which Ippolita did not hear, for she soon sunk into a perfect trance of anxious thought.

The voices of her sons, at length, carried Emilia away, leaving her victim

sitting still on her miserable bed, pale, speechless, and despairing.

Thus passed the night.

The next morning Emilia appeared, at a later hour than usual, with Ippolita's breakfast. She affected an air of disdainful reserve, and would have come and gone without speaking, had not Ippolita conquered herself so far as to ask, whether she might not have her customary walk, under the charge of Renati?

Emilia's reply destroyed Ippolita's only prospect in such a request. She was told, that in future another person must accompany Renati, since she had taught her guardians to apprehend every thing from her subtlety.—"I shall attend you," said Emilia.

Ippolita's first impulse was to reject this indulgence, for her mind was nearly conquered by disappointment: but timely recollecting that she ought not to withdraw from the remotest possibility of interesting Renati, she threw on her veil, and bidding

Emilia lead the way, followed her down stairs.

As they passed Alessandro and his brother, who were standing in the doorway, the latter contrived to entangle some part of his military accoutrements in Ippolita's veil, so that it fell aside. The earnestness of his gaze, as Ippolita tremblingly endeavoured to cover her face again, brought the bashful blood into her cheek: that blood rushed in stronger tides, when she heard this young man burst into a loud and jocular laugh, as if amused with her confusion. She passed on indignant.

In the garden she found Renati sulkily walking to and fro: he bowed without speaking; and chilled by this ill-boding silence, she felt as though all her dependence were gone. Unable to contend longer against the many wretched feelings which were subduing her, she then burst into tears: but too proud for the display of sufferings in which none sym-

pathised, yet thinking, with a breaking heart, of that time when but a single tear in her eye brought an expression of tenderest participation into that of Valombrosa, she traversed her limited path, wiping away her tears by stealth as they flowed unseen, beneath her veil.

Though her features and actions were obscured by the thick foldings of this veil, she could note those of others; and she now saw with uneasiness that Valentino and Alessandro had followed her out, and that the former, in the intervals of his obstreperous merriment, was prying at her.

She bore this scrutiny as long as possible, till its continuance, acting upon nerves already tremblingly excited, and awakening a variety of indistinct fears, overcame the power of endurance, and at once advancing to Valentino, she threw up her veil, with a mingled expression of nobleness and touching apprehension, and fixed her eyes upon him;

those eyes which had so often been found irresistible!

"Good soldier!" she said, "you come of course from the armies: know you aught of my brother Lorenzo de Medici? is he still in the field, and with the Signor Guidobaldo?"

The young man she addressed, seemed as if nature had not meant him for a profligate, nor a villain, for he coloured up to his temples, and looked irresolute an instant; then folding his arms, and resuming an insolent air, he said carelessly, "Lady, I interfere with no one's concerns. My mother is fond of talking, —ask her."

He turned on his heel, and as if in derision, began whistling the very air which had first kindled the hopes of Ippolita. She could bear no more: a deep sigh burst from her heart, as clasping her hands, and raising her gushing eyes to heaven, she invoked that unfortunate father whom this air recalled.

Her walk was ended with her hopes. She withdrew precipitately from the garden, and returning to her chamber, devoted herself to solitude for the remainder of the day.

The wearisome day passed; the sun sunk, and the moon arose; night again steeped other senses in deep and refreshing sleep: but she sat at her now-barred window, regardless that only a star or two twinkled with broken rays through its intervals. Her gaolers had been long in bed, and the profound silence which finally succeeded to their frequent bursts of laughter, was less oppressive to her sense than the discordant sound of mirth. Now and then the monotonous wailing of a sea-bird, or the fitful rushing of a blast, increased the depressing effect of solitude and gloom. Ippolita wept uncontrollably; and when she strove to think, — when she endeavoured to imagine what were the events most likely to follow her vain effort at interesting a

stranger, or what means might be found of evading its consequences, her brain seemed to fail under the load, and every power of thought and action extinguish within her.

She had known a variety of calamities; she had known what it was to be deserted in fearful extremity by every human being, but never till now had she felt deserted by herself.

Broken in spirit, bowed down by a sense of her own helplessness, and her persecutor's power, she that could have patiently endured, — nay, that had endured all the horrors of want and of war; all the rigors of adverse fortune; all the martyrdom of self-denying affection; all the grief of losing parent and friends, now sunk under the oppressive dread inseparable from the idea of a lawless, resentful lover, returning to the place where she would be at his mercy.

" O let me not think I shall be left alone in that direful hour!" she exclaimed

aloud, convulsively locking her hands together, and falling on her knees, with looks that might have moved even Guidobaldo himself, had he been there to witness them. "Thou wilt be with me, O Father!" She addressed the Father of all. "Thou wilt release my soul, ere worse than death —" Her voice was now suffocated by the violent action of her frame: every fibre of that tortured and delicate frame shook as she continued to kneel with a face of ashy paleness, and eyes that had suddenly lost the power of weeping.

A deep silence followed, which was finally interrupted by a low whisper at her door. Ippolita started up, and drew near the spot whence the sound proceeded. "Caution, Lady!" said a voice without; "a friend speaks. I come to tell you that your brother and the Signor Guidobaldo are shut up in Vicenza just now; the French are before the place, and the siege is likely to last these next

two months. Cheer up, therefore; I'll get you out of this prison long before that, if you'll trust to me."

"All-gracious Providence!" ejaculated Ippolita, thus evincing the first impulse of her grateful soul; "generous man — who are you? Is it Renati?" She asked the question bewildered between doubt and joy.

"No — Valentino," answered the man, in a tone which ill-agreed with the coarse levity he had either felt or assumed through the day. "Don't mistrust me, Lady," for he heard her shudder of disappointment, "I am an honest fellow, or what should I come here for? My heart's not made of the same stuff with Alessandro's; and I don't uphold my poor mother in her over-complaisance to her foster-son: but I dare not tell her so just now, while she has you under lock and key. What can I do to serve you?"

"O take me from this place!" ex-

claimed Ippolita, all loosed to hope and confidence.

"That's not possible," was the reply; "I am only one to three, and I shed no kindred blood, even for an oppressed woman. But I'll go any where for you. Speak low, and say where."

Ippolita's heart beat so thick that she could with difficulty articulate: doubts and fears, and grateful transports, flashed with such rapidity through her heart, that she dreaded lest the whole scene were an effect of disordering intellect, and it was a moment or two ere she could answer. At length she repeated as distinctly as her extreme agitation would permit, some directions for finding her uncle the Cardinal, and Prince Rossano, with an intreaty that they would immediately come with a sufficient number of armed followers, or with some legal instrument to ensure her liberation.

"And would not you like to let the Marquis Valombrosa know where to find

you?" asked the young man, with a little archness or levity in his tone.

"Treat that name with respect," interrupted Ippolita, "if you would have me believe you true."

"I respect it in my heart!" was the reply, with seeming sincerity. "The Marquis did *me* a good turn once, without knowing it; and I'll pay him back the obligation, if I can."

"You know him, then!" exclaimed Ippolita, melting at his image, and thrilling back into all the soft delight of happier days. "Oh, tell me, does he live?"

"I am told here that he does, Lady! but I do not know him. I am to go, then, to the Cardinal; and, if I don't find him, seek out the Prince Rossano. The grass shan't grow to my feet, I promise you; so take comfort while I am gone."

"O heaven! and must I wait here till you have found my friends—till they can come to me!" exclaimed Ippolita,

agonized with the prospect of such alarming delay.

"Hush! hush!" repeated Valentino; and struck by the perturbation with which he spoke Ippolita stood silent and trembling.

Some minutes elapsed ere the soldier spoke again, and then he whispered, "It was nothing.—We must be brief, Lady! As we can't enter into explanations, you must just take me on my word,—the word of a soldier, and a tender-hearted fellow, who never yet could bear to see true love crossed; and be sure that some saint or angel will protect you, till your friends come to take the trouble off their hands. I'll be away on this errand by to-morrow's dawn. Good night!"

"Stay, stay, friend! this token for my uncle, or Prince Rossano,—the jewel for your own charges," said Ippolita, tearing Rosalia's bracelet from her arm, and pushing it with difficulty through a chasm between the ill-fitted door and

the flooring of her chamber. God will reward you as you deal with me!"

"So be it!" was Valentino's brief answer, in a tone half banter, half seriousness; and taking up the bracelet he stole swiftly down stairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

It would be difficult to say in what state of mind he left Ippolita. The moment he was gone, and gone with this cherished memorial of friends best loved, she felt as though she had suffered herself to be rifled of a treasure.

The occasional tone of levity with which Valentino had spoken, and the recollection of his rude gaze and laughter in the morning, came over her with a pang of self-blame. Against these she vainly balanced his more frequent tone of frank-hearted compassion, his vehement assurances of good faith, his grateful mention of Valombrosa, (and who that Valombrosa had benefited could be ungrateful? she thought,) and the care-

lessness of deception in the present instance, where nothing was required to give her protectors greater power over her, and no evident reward tempted deception.

But, after all, Valentino was the son of Emilia, and the brother of Alessandro. If force were to be employed for her release, the lives of these relatives might be endangered. Was it likely, therefore, that one of their own blood would have the Roman virtue to endanger them, from motives of pure compassion for another?

This plain question startled Ippolita: but anxiously considering the subject in every point of view, she finally believed it possible that gratitude to Valombrosa for some signal benefit, united with a natural abhorrence of oppression, might induce a man to sacrifice partial affection to conscience. The very act by which Valentino would make his mother and brother liable to the vengeance of Ippo-

lita's friends, would give him a right to stipulate for gentle proceedings towards them; and in short as they could only be considered the instruments of Guidobaldo, it was upon that fierce person, and her brother Lorenzo, that resentment would fall.

Thus Valentino might actually intend to serve her, without expecting to endanger the real welfare of his own relations; for if Emilia's boast of the legacy were true, perhaps the certainty that no pecuniary distress would follow his brother's dismission from the service of his German master, might have given firmness to Valentino's better principle.

The more Ippolita ventured to convince herself that Valentino meant her kindly, the stronger grew her fear lest his exertions in her favour might be made too late: for if any accident should delay him in his progress to her uncle, or retard the means employed for liberation, Guidobaldo might be released from

his military duty at Vicenza, and have removed her to some other prison.

The anguish of such a thought was only to be combated by that habitual sense of Almighty Goodness, which had so often tried her by imminent danger, but never abandoned her to destruction; and upon that Almighty Goodness she fixed her whole soul, with all the strength of which that harassed soul was now capable.

She slept not, that night. Hope and fear kept her waking, till that dawn broke which her new friend had mentioned as the time for his departure.

True to his word, Valentino was stirring with the lark: Ippolita heard his voice at Emilia's door calling on her to rise and get him some breakfast; and soon afterwards she heard the horse that was to carry him to Trieste, as she supposed, pacing to and fro on the sands.

Her window now was barred, so that she could no longer view any thing but

sea and sky: objects below, were lost to her: she therefore assured herself of Valentino's departure at last, only by his gay benediction to those who stood by him, while he mounted his horse, and by the sound of the animal's brisk trot, as he rode away.

When even the echo of that sound was no longer audible, she threw herself back upon her bed, exhausted with fore-gone anxiety, and relieved from its present pressure. Sleep, almost immediately, seized upon her, and she lay steeped in that death-like repose which is often fearful to those who witness it, but salutary to the sleepers themselves, till Emilia appeared with her late breakfast.

Few words were mutually exchanged: Emilia appeared in haste to be gone and converse on some momentous matter with Alessandro; and Ippolita was rather in the mood of musing alone, than of walking with such a companion.

From this period, till one much later,

Ippolita's days and nights were almost entirely spent in mental supplication of that Gracious Being who can alone bestow a blessing upon our hopes; and though she heard constantly from Emilia that intelligence was gone to Guidobaldo of her *pernicious* attempt at escape, and that so soon as he either sent or came, to convey her to some safer residence, Emilia would gladly disburden herself of her charge, and hasten with Alessandro to take possession of the land which had been willed to them in Romagna.

Though this was purposely repeated, Ippolita ventured to hope that as Valentino was said to be the messenger, he would proceed on a far different errand, to far different scenes, and that consequently she had nothing to apprehend from the re-awakened vengeance of her cruel lover.

She listened in patient silence: neither fear darkening her brow, nor groan struggling in her breast, as they were wont to do

when Emilia formerly pictured the probable fury of Guidobaldo. The hand of a merciful Providence had withdrawn the cloud from her soul, and she now looked with the eye of Faith for deliverance from future evil.

A sacred serenity soon diffused itself throughout her whole frame, bringing health and reviving beauty: perhaps, in addition to higher considerations, Ippolita felt the influence of that cheering season, which never fails to excite ideas of renovation and hope in the human heart, however depressed by circumstances; that cheering season, in which every thing breathes the vernal spirit of youth, and every object is an awakening call to gratitude!

It was now the very end of February, and already the snows of a short, but severe winter, were dissolved as by magic, and the bosom of earth appeared covered with delicate flowers.

The roots of the old chesnut-tree in

the watch-tower garden, where Ippolita began again to loiter and find employment, were thick with violets and primroses, the soft perfume of which breathed of purity and peace. Again that sparkling scintillation of the air which seems to give life and movement to distant and inanimate things, played over the sea and land, deepening the dark blue of the one, and brightening the luminous green of the other. Sounds of cheerfulness, and sights of pleasure, reached even to her cloud-topped prison: these were but the happy notes and busy wings of birds 'tis true, hurrying to and fro, in preparation of their nests; but they imaged the dear delights and tender duties of domestic affection, and as such, Ippolita marked them with a melting and sympathising heart. Such joys, such cares were never likely to be her lot; but she could rejoice (even while she sighed) with the innocent little creatures upon whom Providence has bestowed the delightful capacity

of loving, and providing for their offspring.

Sometimes a tear would steal down her cheek, while contemplating the probable termination of all her youthful hopes—a joyless cloister! So loving! so beloved! and by such a heart as Valombrosa's! Yet must she renounce him and the world!

The necessity of resigning such rare happiness, seemed aggravated in painfulness, that but for a few arbitrary enactments of severe policy, it might have been her own! Then she chid herself for so considering it, conscious that her consolation under such privation was the certainty that she lived in Valombrosa's heart; and that though perhaps for ever separated in person, their spirits would continue to meet in tender regret, and unalienable affection.

Her lot, as far as it related to him, might be sad, but it would not be agitated by those cruel storms of fear, and

jealousy, and despair, which torture those who love in uncertainty, or without expectation of return. She could muse upon his gracious image, without blushing with a sense of abasement; she could soothe the sorrow of endless separation by calling him *her own*, in the fullest and most sacred sense; and she might still hoard up, in some secret recess of her soul, one remnant of hope, grounded on the extraordinary vicissitudes of fortune, which, if it never were realised, would at least blessedly cheat her on to the end of life!

With this sweet drop in her cup; how could she complain of its bitterness? She did not complain. Grateful for a release from her worst apprehension respecting Guidobaldo Alviano, and firmly trusting to her present earnest of Heaven's protection, she waited with disciplined feelings for the appointed hour of her deliverance.

Days, however, wore away: she watched

the sea and the land for signs of approaching friends, till her raised spirit gradually drooped. She dreaded lest some misfortune had befallen Valentino, yet she durst not give her feelings utterance, nor could she obtain, even from Renati, any information concerning the fate of the man; she had, therefore, no means of conjecturing where her uncles might be at the present juncture, nor how the contest between the Confederates and the Venetians might affect her family interest.

It was evident, however, that Emilia was impatient to be gone from the tower, and that she was indeed anxious to deliver up her charge into the hands of Guidobaldo. The woman talked incessantly of her new wealth, and of the charming residence which waited her arrival; ostentatiously exaggerating its value and appearance, till, infected by her own falsehoods, she believed that a villa which was but the decent house

attached to a respectable alum-manufactory.

Ippolita once caught a few sentences between the mother and son, as they walked behind her in the garden, which led her to suspect that the son was even more earnest to quit his humiliating situation than the former; and that eager to enjoy or to dissipate the little money which had been left to him, he was disposed, from that feeling, to yield up his chance of future reward for securing Ippolita.

The argument which silenced his impatience seemed to be, that if she escaped Guidobaldo, she might hereafter find means to avenge herself; and that consequently it was only prudent in her oppressors to provide against such an evil by waiting till they should know she was transferred to other custody even stronger than their own.

Ippolita heard some, but fancied more of this discourse; and, for once, fancy

prompted right. Yet all the advantage she reaped from what she overheard, was the conviction that Valentino was indeed the only messenger they had dispatched to Guidobaldo, and that consequently if he were true to his word, her own friends would be enabled to find her, long ere her enemy could be apprised of the necessity for her removal and stricter guard.

There was but one thought which often troubled this expectation; a fear that the confusion of the warring states through which her friends must pass, might obstruct their way to the neutral port of Trieste, and that when there, they might not be permitted to proceed further into Austrian Istria.

When she was at *Il bel Deserto*, the Pope was in alliance with France and Germany, and had joined his troops to their's in the impolitic design of crushing Venice. Guidobaldo had since told her that he had deserted the Venetian

standard for that of the Pontiff, therefore the Pontiff, so bound to him, might refuse to make that appeal to the Emperor which could alone authorise her uncles to enter and search the fortress of an Austrian subject, and which must cover Guidobaldo with opprobrium. No means to free her, then, remained, but force; a surprise of the watch-tower by armed followers; and for that she endeavoured to prepare herself.

Three tedious weeks had slowly passed, when one evening as Ippolita sat silently by the side of Emilia, in the lower chamber, (for Emilia now rarely allowed her the luxury of being alone,) the tramp of horses was heard at a distance, and the voices of men came on the wind.

The sounds instantly attracted Ippolita's eye to the huge half-circular window, which looked landward, and together with its heavy stone-work, filled up one side of the hall. She bent forward, and saw a large company of horsemen

descending the steep road leading from the interior, in the direction of the watch-tower. They might only be travellers proposing to embark somewhere on the coast; but they might be persons sent to her assistance. At that thought she started from her seat; fear of disappointment so predominating over hope, that every drop of blood deserted her face.

Emilia's quick glance followed the direction of her's; and smiling, sarcastically, at her visible emotion, she exclaimed, "My Lord Guidobaldo returned victorious! — Yes, doubtless, my Lord Guidobaldo!"

"Then I am lost! and Valentino"— Ippolita stifled what would have followed, and sunk back into her seat.

While she sat momentarily stunned with the bitterness of being betrayed and deceived, Emilia looked more earnestly from the window, her countenance changing, it was evident, as the horsemen approached nearer. All at once she

ejaculated something about being mistaken; and running out into the open court, called in her shrillest tone upon Alessandro.

Ippolita, again roused into hope and action, sprung from her seat, and flew to the entrance: there she distinctly saw the troop, which had then gained the level ground, coming at full gallop towards the tower: they were numerous, were well armed, and one bore a crimson banner, charged with some armorial bearing.

The next moment she felt herself seized by Alessandro and Emilia, who were hurrying in together; and ere she could well comprehend what their purpose was, found herself dragged along the passage to a huge stone door which Alessandro violently wrenched open, then pulling her down a flight of steep steps, he pushed her into a vault beyond.

Not a word was addressed to her, during this violent transaction; but the mother and son exchanged a few exclam-

ations, which explained to their victim, that the horsemen advancing were the real Lord of the place, with an unusually numerous train; and that Alessandro had recognised him by the golden lions on his banner.

The ponderous door of the vault was closed upon the vainly-struggling Ippolita, as quickly as the agitation of Emilia and Alessandro would permit; bolted and barred, and secured afterwards. The door at the head of the stairs was as hastily fastened; after which, immediate silence ensuing, assured her that they were gone.

So faint were the sounds which subsequently reached her, that although she continued to call aloud for assistance, till her strength was exhausted, she felt that her feeble voice could never be heard by those above; and even if it were, she trembled to think what new evils might follow: for if this German Cavalier were young and profligate, as she feared too

probable, from his being in any way connected with such a worthless wretch as Alessandro, her sex and situation might eventually expose her to the same insults from him, which she apprehended from Guidobaldo.

Ippolita would have taken the evident terror of Emilia and her son, at this person's arrival, as a decisive proof of his being the reverse of their base natures, had she not remembered that their terror might, with more probability, arise from their fear of his wantonly interfering with Guidobaldo's supposed rights in her. She could but pray that the stranger might be framed of better materials, and have a heart cast in the same generous mould with that of him who protected her at Argentina.—O then, if some good angel might whisper to him that his walls enclosed an innocent and oppressed woman!—But how romantic was such a wish!

Distracted with tumultuous and changing imaginations, yet all alarming, the

unfortunate Ippolita stood breathlessly watching every instant's flight; beseeching deliverance at the hand of Heaven; and striving to re-assure her own sinking faith by repeating the promises of *Him* who bade his fainting disciple walk the waves!

Some hours must have elapsed ere the dreary stillness which had followed her persecutor's departure from the door of her prison, was broken by confused and jarring sounds above. She thought she heard a tumult of voices at the upper door which secured the stairs; and again she tried to make her own wearied voice ascend to the speakers.

At the repetition of her cry, there was an instant's perfect stillness; and then a renewal and increase of the noise which had first roused her.

She heard the sound of the heavy bolts, the fall of an iron bar; the creaking of rusted hinges; then the sudden recoil of the door itself; and immediately

afterwards the rush and struggle of men. Her joyful shriek was now accompanied by broken sentences imploring release and protection. These were answered by several voices in a language she knew not, but which she guessed was German; and by attempts to force open the door of the vault. It was burst open: and Ippolita, who had instinctively thrown herself on her knees while the tumult was going on without, at once beheld a group of men, all bending forward from the steps, with eagerness and interest in their countenances.

The blaze of a torch held by one of the party, threw a strong and cheerful light over them all: it was instant sunshine to Ippolita. She stretched out her grateful and beseeching hands, and would have spoken, but words were suffocated by excess of emotion, and she could only turn her humid eyes upon them, and look all she hoped and all she feared.

One or two of the men addressed her in German: she could but bow her head and make signs expressive of her confidence in their humanity and honour. Yet she knew not whether they did indeed mean her well; for the evident admiration and scrutiny with which they crowded round her, made her shrink into herself. She remained trembling at their feet; while one person, who seemed from the quality of his dress to be rather above the condition of his fellows, issued some order, and the men looked about. Each of them then uttered the same exclamation, and began hastily re-ascending the stairs. In their confusion the torch was thrown down, and trod out, so that Ippolita knew not who it was that now seized her, and bore her from the dungeon to the upper door. She felt that the man did his office respectfully, and she therefore made no resistance.

In the long passage, they were met by a soldier with the torch re-lighted: and

Ippolita was then enabled to find her own way, though still held by her first conductor. In a few minutes she found herself at the entrance of the hall: her spirit failed at sight of several persons there, and a greater glare of light. She shrunk back: her companions rather eagerly than rudely impelled her forward; but while they were doing so, she heard an Italian voice bid them "Proceed at their peril!"

It was Renati, whom she now saw pale, and stained with blood, endeavouring to break from the hold of two stout Germans that had him in custody. Always honest, though often hostile to her, her heart melted at sight of his condition, and she ran towards him. Her steps were arrested by the advance of a man about thirty, whose mien, though he wore only a suit of plain steel, declared him to be of superior birth; and whose deep-seated eyes, though stern and searching, had something noble in them.

He abruptly enquired her name and condition, and connection with the person before him; and for what cause she was a prisoner in his house: assuring her of honourable treatment if she were worthy of it; and warning her not to trifle with his time and his feelings by a fabricated tale of oppression, to varnish an impure life.

As he spoke in Italian, though not fluently, Ippolita addressed Renati in the same language, and made that her reply. The flush of offended dignity was in her cheek, and the same feeling in her breast elevated her vestal beauty into something awful. She thought only of what she was, not of what she might seem; while she called proudly on Renati to answer to the questions now put to her, and which she was ready to satisfy in some separate apartment, to convince the questioner of their mutual truth. She adjured Renati to consider that obstinate silence would only ruin both,

without serving his master's cause; and that in short, to fulfil his duty to that master, and perfect those kind intentions towards herself, of which he had just given her so affecting a proof, he ought to say all that was likely to ensure her respectful treatment from those into whose hands she was fallen. She then turned to the Lord of the tower, and regarding him with a more timid air, besought him, as a knight and a soldier, to have Renati's wounds looked to, if he respected a faithful servant and a brave man.

The Baron immediately issued an order to that effect in German; and further commissioning the person he addressed, to receive in private Renati's account of the Lady and of himself, he gravely took Ippolita's hand, and led her out into a smaller chamber.

Relieved from the embarrassing presence of so many witnesses, Ippolita at once declared her name, and told as

much of her story in brief, as was comprised between the period of her being forcibly carried off from the residence of a friend in Tuscany, and the one now existing. She referred the Austrian Baron to her uncles de Medici; nay, even to the Emperor himself, who had once seen her during her father's lifetime: and concluded by interceding for Renati, and entreating to know why she saw him only, wounded and in bonds?

As she proceeded in her narrative, (during which time the Austrian kept his penetrating eye on her, without once removing it,) another and another shade of doubt cleared from his thoughtful brow; till a countenance was left unveiled, which, however firm and composed, distinctly expressed a heart that could be touched by every kindly sympathy. When he seemed to have made up his mind completely to the truth of all she said, he bowed upon her hand, and without seeking to excuse his cau-

tion, he simply informed her, that he had come into Istria to put his watch-tower in a state of defence, the war now raging in the neighbouring country of Friuli; and that first suspicion was excited by his soldiers discovering Renati concealed amongst some wood, and then by Alessandro's endeavouring to dissuade them from examining the state of some powder lodged in the vault where Ippolita was confined: and that when they found her there, and saw that Alessandro had made his escape in the confusion of the moment, it was natural both for them and for their Lord to ascribe no respectability to her character, but to consider her as some light companion of his retirement, merely thrust out of the way of other associates.

The Austrian Baron explained his own connection with Alessandro, by saying that he believed the man had been originally a deserter from the Italian army, and reduced to the state in which he found him—a private soldier, by habits

of early dissipation: 'but that having been very serviceable to the Baron when he was lying wounded on the field in the preceding year, the former had given him a sum of money, which Alessandro soon ran through; and being himself rendered unfit for service in a subsequent engagement, had again become an object of the Baron's bounty; who thought that the best provision he could make for an unprincipled spendthrift, was to give him a place like that which he did give him, affording food and shelter, and freedom from temptation.

Ippolita then ventured to ask a few questions regarding the situation of her family and her country; and from his explicit replies she learned the truth of certain events which Guidobaldo Alviano and her brother had either concealed or mis-stated.

What she learned was briefly this.

Satisfied with his recovery of Romagna, and alarmed at the increasing successes

of the French, the Pope had begun to suspect that they intended making themselves masters of all the north of Italy; and that the republic of Venice once destroyed, there would remain no barrier to stem their power. Had the Emperor's arms been as brilliantly crowned as theirs, or rather had his character possessed the energy of Louis XII., the scheme of an equal aggrandisement for the two monarchs and the Holy See, might have been pursued to the contentment of their separate claims, and the ruin of Venice: but as Germany was every day losing something in opinion and fact, by her irresolution and inactivity; and the Pope's troops, far less fortunate than those of Louis; the scale was preponderating infinitely too much for the safety of Rome itself, in favour of France. His Holiness lost not an hour, therefore, in withdrawing himself from the League of Cambray: and at the time in which the Baron spoke, his troops so

lately opposed to those of the Venetians, were now leagued with those very Venetians in repelling France and the empire. Thus, then, Guidobaldo's boast that he had renounced his patrimony and honours for the sake of obtaining Giuliano de Medici's enlargement, was utterly false.

He had, indeed, facilitated that desirable event, through the Pope's desire of securing his military talents to the Venetian cause, which had just lost its ablest acting General by the death of Count Pitigliano; but as the interests of Rome and Venice were then become one, he acted with their permission as General of both; retaining the rewards already decreed to his family by the one, and expecting new honours hereafter from the other.

More disgusted than ever with a character of such base falsehood, Ippolita heard with joy that he was indeed shut up in Vicenza, which the French and Germans were besieging. Of Lorenzo,

her informant only knew that he was not believed to be in Vicenza; as he, from private policy, took no outward part in the confederate war. Giuliano de Medici, he had heard, had regained the confidence of the Pope: but whether from the meré spirit of justice, or because his Holiness was now adverse to France, might be a question. The Baron himself suspected, (and at that suspicion how did Ippolita thrill!) that he was actuated by the wise policy of checking France in her encroachments; and therefore meditated overturning the power of its friend Soderini in Florence, and perhaps of replacing the Medici. It was said that both the brothers of that house were now in the train of his Holiness.

While Ippolita was lost in the crowd of hopes and fears which this unexpected information conjured up, the Baron stood revolving something in his own mind: at length he said abruptly, while fixing his searching eye again upon her

face with his first look of strict examination, "Madam, have you ever known a Marquis Valombrosa?"

Ippolita's best and brightest blood rushed to her face at that unforeseen question. Always afraid of compromising Valombrosa's safety, yet ever anxious to hear all that related to him, she faltered out, "I do — I did. — Does he live?"

"'Tis she then!" observed her companion, disregarding the question; and his countenance instantly expanded into such openness that he seemed another man. His very voice partook of the encouraging change.

Ippolita repeated her inquiry with as much inward, but less outward emotion, than at first.

The Baron replied, that when he last heard of Valombrosa he was recovering of a pistol wound which he received nearly five months back from the hand of an unknown assassin. This wound had been at first considered mortal, the

ball having passed through the lungs: but under the care of a skilful surgeon belonging to his family, Valombrosa had happily falsified the predictions of others, and was now able to appear at intervals amongst his anxious friends.

"And his sister!" asked Ippolita, that name almost extinguishing in her deep emotion.

"She bore this trial wonderfully!" returned the Baron. "After the first great shock, she rallied; and for two months never left her brother's bed-side. He lay all that time nearly unconscious."

Ippolita did not answer; she was overcome by the ideas those words presented to her. Valombrosa lying on the very brink of the grave for two long months, and for her sake! All the impulses of that generous heart, and all the powers of that noble mind, suspended for such a dismal period! She could not restrain her tears; they burst from her; and that with such impetuous grief, that the Baron

made a few steps towards her, with the intention of uttering some words of concern: but little used to the expression of his kindest feelings, he felt ashamed of the womanish movement, and drew back again in grave silence.

Ippolita quickly conquered herself, and trying to look composed, told the Baron she had known Rosalia Valori and her brother well in Tuscany, and was therefore shocked to hear that any affliction had befallen them. "You know them, my Lord?" she asked tremulously.

"I am related to them," was the answer. "Their mother was a Tyrolese, and the cousin of mine. I enquired if you knew the Marquis Valombrosa, because it is not much above six months ago since I received a letter from him, the business of which was to require my good offices secretly with the Emperor, for the payment to you of that very debt you mentioned just now. I did stir in the business at his request, (for though

he and I have not met since we were boys, his high reputation flies every where,) and doubtless it was to certain movements of the Emperor's in consequence, that you owe your brother's concurrence with Guidobaldo Alviano's scheme, and Valombrosa perhaps the stroke of an assassin."

Is there an echo in the mind, that we are sometimes able to answer words after awhile, which we did not hear when uttered? Ippolita certainly did not for some time notice what the Baron told her of his successful interference with the Imperial court in her behalf, so absorbed was she by the pleasure of looking at a man nearly related to friends beloved, and of whom she had heard them speak! She even fancied she found a latent likeness in some of her companion's tones and looks to those of Valombrosa! A delicious feeling of additional obligation to that first and dearest protector meanwhile stole over

her, and pressing down her joyfully-throbbing heart, she whispered to herself, "O be it ever to thee, Valombrosa, that I am to owe all the mercies and blessings of life. — Rather let me say," and she penitently crossed herself, "ever be thou Heaven's instrument of mercy and blessing to me!"

She then turned to the noble Austrian, and thanking him for his exertions in her favour by the name of Baron Wernheim, expressed her anxiety to ascertain the situation of Renati.

Wernheim assured her, with a soldier's smile, that the blood which she had seen on Renati's clothes flowed from a deep but not important cut in his left arm, which had been too hastily given by one of the German soldiers, in consequence of his resisting their attempt to dislodge him from his concealment.

"As one you are interested in, from his fidelity to his trust, — though few ladies would be just enough to admire

such fidelity so exercised,—added the Baron, I am ready to order the man's release. But what are we to do with the woman that abetted Alessandro in his iniquity? She is secured in an upper chamber."

Ippolita took a few moments to consider; and at length it was determined that Renati should have his dismissal, and Emilia be sent to a convent some miles inland, there to be detained until Ippolita were safely lodged in the hands of her relations.

Of the truth or falsehood of Valentino, Wernheim made light. To him it seemed of no consequence now to inquire what he had purposed. The probability was, that he had either amused himself with the coarse jest of cheating her into hope, or that discouraged by the difficulty of reaching the persons she named, would abandon the attempt. At all events, if by miracle any of her friends should come to Istria in search of her, the Baron's

people would be there to give them information.

Quite uncertain where either Giuliano de Medici, or the Cardinal, might be found, from the fluctuations of the war, which made their friends masters of places to-day, which they lost to-morrow, Wernheim, besides the impossibility of his conducting her himself to the camp or court of a sovereign hostile to his own, suggested her taking advantage of this favourable opportunity for soliciting the Emperor in her own person.

He was going, he said, to meet his Imperial Majesty at Inspruck; and had an aunt who was the superior of an order of Mercy in that neighbourhood; and if Ippolita chose she might sanctuary with her, for any length of time. Whether she then failed or succeeded in her main object of obtaining justice, such a residence would be the one least suspected by her persecutors; and she might stay

in it, till her uncles thought fit to reclaim her.

"O it is sweet to suffer, when our misfortunes show us so much goodness in our fellow-creatures!" involuntarily exclaimed Ippolita, thinking at once of Valombrosa, of Prince Rossano, and many unexpected friends of former days. "My Lord, I accept your generous protection as frankly as you offer it. May Heaven reward you with the dearest wish of your heart! whatever that wish may be."

The tempered and serious eyes of Wernheim brightened up for a moment, as though they said, "I'll take that blessing for a prediction!" But whether his heart had in fact any earnest wish or not, they quickly returned to their usual sedate expression; and he made no comment upon Ippolita's benediction.

When returned to the hall, they found only Renati, and the officer appointed to examine him.

While the latter was reporting the result of that examination to his Lord, Ippolita was inquiring into the state of the poor fellow's wound, and learning his own wishes respecting himself.

She was again touched by Renati's blunt assurance that he had determined to incur the risk of remaining concealed at the watch-tower when the Austrians arrived, rather than leave his master's sister at the mercy of strangers; so when told by Alessandro to shift for his own safety, at first view of Baron Wernheim's troop, he had hid himself in a stack of wood, near enough to afford him an opportunity of watching their movements.

"But if so large a party had been commanded by one inclined to treat me ill," said Ippolita, kindly, "what could you have done for me, Renati?"

"Nothing — to be sure, Lady!" was Renati's short answer, looking down. "But they should have hewed me to

pieces first, before a hair of your head was harmed; and that would have been a satisfaction. They got me, after all, by a pitiful trick: while I was fighting one to two in front, half a dozen of them crept behind and pinioned me; and then I'd just got this plaguy wound. But I should have defended you, Lady, better than I did myself; take my word for it."

Ippolita smiled, though her eyes filled with tears. Unable to speak, she gave Renati's hard hand so strong a pressure, that he looked up, and the sight of that smile and those eyes brought the blood into his face. It was the mixed flush of sudden emotion, and of shame at feeling it. He turned abruptly away; and soon afterwards Baron Wernheim approached, and expressed himself completely satisfied with what his officer had heard from Renati, to whom he now proffered immediate liberty.

"And the lady, Signor?" asked the latter, his eye finishing the sentence.

"I proceed to another place, on my own concerns," replied Ippolita. "Go you to your home. When we meet again, Renati, I hope it may be in happier days for us both! Whenever we do, if those I love best, have the greatest power, their conduct will convince you how much I have respected your fidelity to a master little worthy of such a servant."

Renati did not take the hand she graciously extended to him; perhaps he did not see it. He stood for a moment with his arms closely wrapt round him, looking on the ground, but evidently, from the workings of all his features, agitated by some internal conflict.

At length he said in a hoarse, interrupted voice, "If I knew what was my duty — I'd do it: — but — if I might go along with you, Lady, I should think that was right still, — not to lose sight of you. — You will be all among strangers now. It seems to me you should have somebody of your own to protect you,

and be at your orders. Yet if my Lord Baron, who is a soldier and a knight, thinks I ought to go to the camp, — I'll e'en leave you, Lady, to yourself, and good angels!"

Something like a sigh burst from Renati with the last words; but he raised his war-burnt brow, and looked with manly confidence upon the Baron.

The latter enquired Ippolita's wishes, and, learning them, approached Renati. He put a sword into his hand. "I need not bid you use this weapon worthily upon all occasions," he said; "I hope, however, you will find no occasion to draw it in this lady's defence while she is under my protection. From this moment you are free to follow her, or go whither you please. But you will remember that the instant you enter *her* service, you quit that of her brother: the two characters cannot be joined. As *her* servant, it will be your duty to keep her movements secret, if she requires

that; as his, it would be your duty to apprize him of them all. Choose now between them."

Renati turned abruptly away from the glance of Ippolita's momentarily-lifted eye: he took a hasty step or two towards the door, without speaking, then as hastily returning, said, "God bless you, Lady!" bowed his head to the Baron, and strode out of the hall.

Ippolita gave a tear to his departure; the Baron muttered some approving words. He then proceeded to inform Ippolita that he could speedily determine on the means for fortifying the watch-tower, and therefore should be ready to attend her by noon the next day, with such of his followers as were not meant to garrison his little fortress.

Assured of his lenient intentions towards Emilia, Ippolita declined seeing her; so taking a grateful farewell of this new friend, she left him to midnight council with his officers; and ascended

for what she hoped the last time to her sky-roofed chamber.

There, in silence and solitude, with what fervent gratitude did she pour out her thanksgivings to the Greatest and Best of Beings!

So deeply was she impressed with the magnitude of the mercies just vouchsafed to her, in the prosperous prospects of her family, the miraculous recovery of Valombrosa, the preservation of herself from the most frightful evils, and now the path that was at once cleared for her to reach an object which had been so long the goal of all her efforts, — so deeply was she impressed with all this; so awful the impression, that her heart had no admission for those softer hopes and wishes to which it was calculated afterwards to give life and activity.

She remained long upon her knees, in pious thankfulness: the vivid transport of her feelings gradually subsiding into that tranquil confidence of security,

which she had not known for many months; and that serene expectance of future blessing which is the safest and sweetest state of the human soul.

In this temper she seated herself on the side of her bed to muse at leisure: she fancied she could not sleep; but sleep insensibly stole on her, and she sank upon her pillow.

While she slept, Paradise seemed opened before her; a Paradise where were assembled all that she had loved and lost; all that she loved and still possessed. But ere half the night had elapsed, she was awakened by a hideous noise. She leaped from her bed, and opening her door, hurried some steps down stairs; for she was not undressed. The noise increased: it was evidently the clash of swords, and the report of fire-arms. The watch-tower was attacked then! She listened: a confusion of contentious voices echoed through the passages below; one pealed above them all; it

was the tremendous voice of Guidobaldo Alviano!

Ippolita heard no more: she fell senseless on the stairs.

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